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THE EARL OF BRECON.

A Tragedy in Five Acts.

FAITH'S FRAUD.

A Tragedy in Five Acts.

THE FERRYMAN.

A Drama in Five Acts.



BY
ROBERT LANDOR, M.A.

AUTHOR OF THE "IMPIOUS FEAST," AND THE "COUNT AREZZI."

LONDON
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P R E F A C E.

AN author seldom derives much advantage from his own criticism. The design of a work, so far as there is anything unusual in its composition, should be discoverable without assistance.

But there are other than literary objects, of which he may be permitted to speak. We apprehend little present danger that the world of letters should divide itself, like the still noisier world of politics, between two great principles ; leaving no room for peace or neutrality. The mischievous and immoral publications of our own country, at least, are amply counterbalanced by others, greater in number and far superior in ability. Between these two regions of light and darkness, lie interposed almost all the provinces occupied by Fancy, as well as many other districts, scarcely inferior to them in opulence or extent.

Men confident in their own good purposes are often incapable of perceiving, that any system, which is less direct than the one they have adopted, may, notwithstanding its apparent obliquity, prove quite as effectual. Thus religious writers and readers are sometimes little tolerant of any other. With one view, and but one method, they forget that, by their own account, the largest part of the community has, at present, no such taste. Whatever may be their wishes, the thoughtful can

address themselves only to the thoughtful, and the pious to the pious. They feed the full, and warn the prudent. Meanwhile, whole multitudes, who are unapproachable by these guides, will seek amusement in dangerous quarters, unless they may be better supplied elsewhere.

Perhaps the largest contributors to morality, and even to religion, in our age, have been men whose works ostensibly professed no such design. By purifying and ennobling the heart, they may have best prepared it for holier lessons than their own.

An early, and at one period a most just, objection to the Drama, can hardly be continued where its principles are derived from religious truth, and where there never has been any view to representation on the stage. Poetry founded on fictitious subjects may be discouraged, but it is no longer prohibited, by the most severe : and who will care whether it assume the one form or the other—the colloquial or the narrative ?

The first of these dramas has for its moral, patient forbearance under shame and ruin. The second, sacred obligations discharged at the expense of other sacrifices as well as life. The third, endurance and forgiveness.

THE EARL OF BRECON.

A Tragedy, in Five Acts.

B

CHARACTERS.

ON THE PART OF BRECON.

MAHEL, *Son of Bernard Newmark, late Earl of Brecon.*

MILO FITZWALTER, *Earl of Hereford, married to Mahel's sister.*

FATHER STEPHEN, *Chaplain, Confessor, and formerly Governor of Mahel.*

SIR MICHAEL BRACE, *Seneschal of Brecon.*

SIR HUMFREY OF USKE, SIR REGINALD SAINT VALLERY,
SIR PAUL, &c., *Knights of Brecon.*

ON THE PART OF BUILTH.

GEOFFREY NEWMARK, *Lord of Builth, Cousin of Mahel.*

SIR PHILIP DE BREOS, *Kinsman of Geoffrey.*

SIR ANDREW FITZHAMAN, SIR SIMON DE LA HAY, SIR
HUGH, &c., *Knights of Builth.*

FEMALES.

COUNTESS OF BRECON, *Mother of Mahel and Margaret.*

MARGARET, *Countess of Hereford, Sister of Mahel.*

BERTHA FITZWALTER, *Sister of Hereford, betrothed to Mahel.*

MONKS, SERVANTS, SOLDIERS, &c.

BARNABAS, RALPH, FRIAR BALDWIN, *and two Welsh Princes.*

*The first two and the last two acts at Brecon Castle—The
third act in Carmarthenshire.*

THE EARL OF BRECON.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Chamber in Brecon Castle.

BARNABAS and the MASTER FALCONER.

BARNABAS.

THE Lord of Builth, and master everywhere.
His uncle's burial issues in a feast ;
Therefore he will be merry. What cares he
How sadly show the hangings overhead,
So that the wine-cup sparkle ruddily ?
I look for pipes and cornets by-and-bye.
With this his uncle he did eat and drink ;
And now he eats and drinks because of him.

FALCONER.

Since noon I doubted of his holiday.
Pray Heaven he spare the minstrelsy to-night !

BARNABAS.

My place was with the warders last of all,
I could not see the Earls at setting forth.

FALCONER.

He, Geoffrey, Lord of Builth by soccage fief,
Must ride to church chief mourner, in the midst
'Twixt Mahel and the Earl of Hereford !

BARNABAS.

This Builth would take the first man's place from Adam !

FALCONER.

A younger brother's child is nearer kin

Than Bernard Newmark's son and son-in-law !
Of greater majesty than two such earls !
Ever till now men's issue were their heirs.

BARNABAS.

The heralds called their names ?

FALCONER.

Ay, orderly,
With little learning in their craft they might :
The next in blood is highest in degree.
First Mahel, Earl of Brecon : after him
Fitzwalter, Earl of Hereford : and last,
This kinsman Geoffrey Newmark, Lord of Builth.

BARNABAS.

What did he then ?

FALCONER.

Spurred right betwixt the two :
Nor might the pursuivants stop, turn, or shame him.
He bent D'Eyle's silver sceptre 'cross his pate
For only thinking of it.

BARNABAS.

What said Mahel ?

FALCONER.

He ?—not one word. Grief-choked and blind with tears,
He cared not how he went. So Builth rode midst
Through Castlegate and Boroughgate to church,
Despite of Hereford, whose choice was patience,
Or blows, or turning back again.

BARNABAS.

He fills

His cushion at the feast by some such tenure ;
And once again usurps Fitzwalter's place.
The guests bareheaded stood beside their stools,
And in walked Hereford with horns before him—
Grooms, vergers, chamberlains, apparitors—
Sir Humphrey Uske, Sir Giles, Saint Vallery,
But first, the Seneschal to clear his way.
Straight toward the steps, and where the board runs crosswise
He treads suspicionless as heretofore :
And lo ! what finds he there but Geoffrey Builth
In state, as host, beneath the baldichin !
A lord amongst his lieges !

FALCONER.

Mercy on us !

BARNABAS.

Builth calls out "stools and trenchers" lustily,
"Room for his noble kinsman Hereford ;"
But still he keeps his seat. Fitzwalter stares,
Then turns him round to speak that all may hear—
"Our shrovetide gambols last till midsummer."
With that he leads his servants down the hall,
And fairly out of it.

FALCONER.

They ring the beakers !
Empty again ! Run, Barnabas ! *(Exeunt.)*

SCENE II.

A Chamber in the Castle.

MAHEL and FATHER STEPHEN.

STEPHEN.

Our lord at last ! Health to the Earl of Brecon !
With all things good and happy all life through !
Ten days ago we might have hailed him thus :
But death had yet scarce left the vacant chair,
And grief, as envious of a new possessor,
Still kept her place beside it. In his shroud
Our ancient master ruled us all ! we feared
Division of our reverence between you :
So stinted homage even to his heir.
Methought the bell which tolled us home from church,
Maintained so long his awe and sovereignty :
Its last stroke set us free. Our duty now
Is pleased and single too : old love still serves,
Though clad in fresher livery. Take thy place
Still higher as Newmark's Son than Brecon's Earl :
Keep it with all thy might. The meek are blessed—
Both worlds are theirs by promise—take them both :
Be gentle still, and henceforth resolute !

MAHEL.

The rather that my father hoped it not,
I will be so.

STEPHEN.

He ever loved thee best,
Even as it was, when farthest out of sight.

Betwixt himself and what he wished in thee,
A county's breadth had been too strait for peace.

MAHEL.

My duty was not measured by his love.
I have not paid back honor as he earned it.
Above his sepulchre I stood to-day,
As I would wish that both may stand for judgment,
With no reproachful thoughts to plead against me,
Remembering hasty words and rebel hopes:
Nor was pride called as counsellor to grief.
So far my heart upbraids me not.

STEPHEN.

I know it.

In that light government which ends at last,
My speed was winged as swiftly as my prayers—
A prosperous charge and easy to me—yet
I sometimes tremble at mine own success,
Mistrusting whether what I toiled to do—
Good unquestionless apart from that it ends in—
Being timed unseasonably, and placed amiss,
May not prove evil to thee.

MAHEL.

Thou didst teach

That what is good is singly so, or ceases:
We cannot mix or change it.

STEPHEN.

True, I did:

Yet some respect it has to circumstance;
For wise conformity is also good.
Too stubborn good, being proud, is so far evil.
We must retrench a little from its wealth
To furnish out our fortunes worthily.
Pure thoughts, fair customs, gracious biases
Are such to life as sailors to their ship,
Who guide it through the waters by their skill,
But neither choose the voyage nor rule the wind.
They sometimes steer their course a point awry,
And indirectly reach their port the sooner.
Alas, I see thee blush for me! Well, do so—
It shows that grace is still with one of us.

MAHEL.

If only one, it cannot be with me.
Whither wouldst lead me, Father?

STEPHEN.

Back again—

Even to the place I found thee in at first—
Where life's short road, yet single, parts itself;
Thy foot upon the fork 'twixt good and evil—
Paths not unlike, nor far divided, yet—
Great-hearted, ready-handed, generous, careless,
With eyes intent on glory—guileless still
As that first dove, first seen in Paradise,
Which Adam spared to name till taught by Eve.
I say by choice inclined to good. What then?
At such an age who not? This cousin of thine—
Who else like Geoffry Builth? Yet, now his feet
Wade deep, through blood, toward death.

MAHEL.

I cared not then

How soon mine followed him to such an end.
His steps were lighted by the blaze he kindled.
Thou first didst teach me that our feet have uses
Better than those which he has turned them to.
Can this prove evil to me? What dost fear?

STEPHEN.

The path is perilous nevertheless!

MAHEL.

Toward peace?

STEPHEN.

Where peace should be. What hedge shall shelter it?
Our faith? Our universal Faith? She stands
At every turn for every other use:
We swear, we covenant, we traffic by her:
Her name is on our lintels, door-posts, robes:
Her everlasting symbols are displayed
Above our cradles, tables, beds, and graves.
Who questions with her? who forbears to praise her?
Yet who on earth considers what she means?
Her badge of mercy blazons half our shields:
Sword-hilts are fashioned as memorials of it:
The cross adorns stalls built for usury—
Our hostelries have fixed it o'er the door—
It rests on harlots' bosoms in the stews!
This sign of man's forgiveness leads to battle!
While every tyrant hangs its ensign out
In scorn of justice from his battlements,
Mailed prelates march before it to the field—
Priest fights with priest, and both sides under it!
This sign and pledge of mercy! Should I slip
The leash that yet had held thee—cry *halloo*—

Run, swift of foot ! run first in such a race ?
 Alas, because I spared to teach thee thus,
 I tremble, as I said, but not repent !

MAHEL.

Who calls ?

STEPHEN.

The Lady Bertha—then adieu !
 She brings the peace we seek. (*Exit* STEPHEN.)

(*Enter* BERTHA FITZWALTER.

BERTHA.

To one so great
 She would bring something better in its place.

MAHEL.

Better than peace is love alone—bring love
 With love's best promises renewed. Behold,
 My greatness shall receive them on the knee !

BERTHA.

Fie ! not to-day.

MAHEL.

Ay, every day. Foul love,
 Or faithless love, or love unsanctified
 Were so far wise to hide himself from grief,
 As that which scorns and shames him. Such as ours
 May meet each other coming from the tomb,
 Or travelling toward the altar. What would'st bring me,
 If neither love nor peace ?

BERTHA.

I will not shoot
 With ell-long shafts at bees and butterflies—
 I dare not at thyself. I will not spend
 Wise words against love's lisplings ; and I fear
 To aim where they might hurt.

MAHEL.

Afraid of me ?

BERTHA.

Nay, that were cowardice indeed ! Not I !
 All feeblest things on earth have stouter hearts.
 The spaniel basks at large before the fire,
 Nor will he stir a foot of his for thine.
 Old as she is, the cat retains thy stool,
 Like Geoffrey Builth, by right of victory.
 Grooms, foot-boys, falconers, pass with caps unlowered :
 And babes, who fled the beadel's whip a mile,

May run to deafen Mahel with their cries.
Then why should Bertha fear him?

MAHEL.

Why indeed?

BERTHA.

Yet would she have thee feared. A common lord
Made all subordinate degrees seem less :
Earl Bernard's children were his servants too.
But now we quit this page-like garniture,
And should put on authority and awe.
I would not see thee humbler than thy state,
Nor less than those before thee.

MAHEL.

That were ill ;

But worse the sudden appetite o'erfed
With unaccustomed sweets to gluttony—
A newly-feasted beggar's superflux,
Full-gorged and insolent. I need not use
My little sceptre, like a May-day king
Proud of its wreaths and gilding, to abase
Irreverend eyes in lowlier playfellows.
There will be time hereafter to assume
Those graver looks and garments one by one.

BERTHA.

They may be stolen by others first. When wear them
If not to day? Already the thieves break in!
Hereafter! not at present! sometime hence!
To-morrow, perhaps, or next day! Geoffrey Builth
Abates thee scarce an hour for breathing time.
He takes priority as older, stronger,
More skilled, more feared, and better served than thou—
Pushes his shoulder foremost in the crowd,
To hide so small a follower from men's eyes.
Nay, he supplants thee at thy father's grave,
And robs thee of his seat! Six months ago
Would Geoffrey Builth have dealt at Brecon thus?
Jostle with Bernard Newmark for his chair?

MAHEL.

Ay would he, had he wanted it. Hush! hush!
Else must I seal those lips for charity
With other pressure than of argument.
Who now will love light-hearted carelessness,
And unrespective valour marching on
With easy gait, through webs which usage spins

To snare the little legs of weaker men,
 If Bertha hate them thus? Builth's noisy tongue,
 O'erhasty as it is in all offence,
 Seems slow and silent matched against his doings.
 What land, where danger reared his ensigns highest,
 Has seen another nearer them?

BERTHA.

Good sooth,

It were a potent reason to the rest
 For running out of sight from such a wolf,
 If all the beasts beside were hares and foxes.
 Well then, he shall be master every where—
 Ride with a mighty earl on either side him,
 And wear his cap in church while they stand bare!
 Fitzwalter was but deputy to-day,
 So left the feast beneath his government,
 And fled the hall—yet not through fear of him.
 He would have kept his hold at Hereford.
 But come—no matter—bid the guests good bye—
 We are not all too brave for modesty;
 So walk like those before thee. Hark! they call. [Exeunt.]

SCENE III.

The Butlery opening into the Great Hall.

BARNABAS—PETER *the Butler, and* RALPH, *with other servants passing through.*

RALPH.

The widow's eyes, to-day, were dry as mine.
 I fain would see so stout a leading staff
 In hands as strong as those which used to hold it.

BARNABAS.

Together they were over much for me.
 This leading staff was held in partnership;
 And she would rather grip the nether end,
 Than loose the whole of it. Dry-eyed, Sir Pantler!
 It has made mine make water many a time.
 But get thee to thy cellarage again—
 Builth's people will have service.

PETER.

Wine for grooms

Wine for Builth's foresters!

BARNABAS.

Ay, so they say.

PETER.

Not drink metheglin in the barbican ?

BARNABAS.

They will no more of it ; but lift their cry
For Bordelais or Rhenish. Five-hooped stoops
Are empty ere they well have laid the dust
Of such fierce dog-day drouth and sultriness.
Tis five times worse with single jacks. Send down
And broach the triple-butt lodged last of all :
It hath an ancient smatch of Bordilais,
And sundry other kinds, beside crab verjuice.

PETER.

Bid Job be ready with his yokes and measures.
The thirteenth table Rhenish ! We jog on
Towards last year's plenishment apace.

BARNABAS.

There needs

Such thirsty haste to keep abreast their eating.
Both ways the Lord of Builth does mightily ;
He sits beneath his tester like a prince—
Sir Philip and Sir Andrew either side him.
Fain would they make the burial end of all
Like meat, drink, care, or sorrow.

RALPH.

Hast spiced the bowls ?

We must have quarter-tons for buttery service.

PETER.

Who notched the second tale of three-score flagons ?

BARNABAS.

I did count these, and then surceased awhile,
Being out of heart and tallies. Geoffrey Builth
Has got the canopy above his poll,
And rules amongst the mourners merrily.
He followed, since the noon, his uncle's bier ;
And now he fills his seat with broader haunches,
Thinking no more what brought him here to-day,
Than I of Hardicanute.

PETER.

But where is Mahel ?

RALPH.

At prayers belike, with Stephen, in his closet.
Sirs, shall I speak the truth of him, or lie—

Or hold my tongue—or how? This nursing Earl
Is but a babe of two-and-twenty years.
So harmless is he, artless, peaceful, patient—
Of such fair carriage, and such good report,
That he is good for nothing.

PETER.

Why so, gossip?
Because he feasts not here to-day with Builth?
Fitzwalter might have done as son-in-law,
But neither sons or brothers used to do:
Then wherefore good for nothing?

RALPH.

Look abroad—
Our herbs, in field and garden, thrive the best,
Connaturally with clime, and soil, and season:
But sometimes well enough by cheating nature
With feigned conformity, till changed indeed
Through that which renders use as strong as she.
So must we men, to prosper. These are times
For rough and ready hands, like Geoffrey Builth's:
And he who has them not should seem to have.
Our new Earl's sire raised his both high and oft,
But not in prayer.

BARNABAS.

Thou dost with all thy might,
Both pray and preach 'gainst grace and godliness.
Clerk Satan sits at hand to say *amen*!
Great subterranean doctrines, Pantler Ralph!
These herbs of thine are hot.

RALPH.

Canst answer me?

BARNABAS.

Not I—nor care to mix amongst such simples.
Till better furnished with an ell-long spoon,
I shall forbear thy pottage. If our calf
Have too much milk at present in his mouth,
He did not draw it from the cow that bare him,
Nor has he grazed upon these plants of thine.

PETER.

The guests are up! hark! bustle both of ye!

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE IV.

Hall of the Castle, hung with black escutcheons and banners. The guests rising as at the conclusion of a banquet. Geoffrey Lord of Builth, Sir Philip de Breos, Sir Andrew Fitzhaman, Sir Simon de la Hay, Sir Hugh, &c., advance from the cross-table at the upper end to meet Mahel Earl of Brecon; Fitzwalter Earl of Hereford; the Countess Mother of Brecon; her daughter Margaret, Countess of Hereford; and Bertha Fitzwalter; followed from the end opposite by Sir Michael Brace, the Seneschal, Sir Reginald Saint Vallery, Sir Humfrey of Uske, Sir Giles, Sir Paul, and other knights.

MAHEL.

Thanks both to friends and servants for their love.
 Our cousin, the lord of Builth, Sir Philip de Breos,
 Sir Andrew, Simon, Hew, have hosts at Brecon:
 Their beds are with the prior of St. John.
 Others have far to ride before they sleep,
 And twilight shews the earliest of the stars.
 While d'Eyle prepares to summon all again,
 Fill me a cup of wine, Sir Michael Brace,
 That I may drink to each a happier meeting,
 And health till then. *(Trumpets sound.)*

SECOND HERALD.

Stand bare awhile!

FIRST HERALD.

O yes!

SECOND HERALD.

Those caps off, yonder—peace!

FIRST HERALD.

O yes, O yes!

All barons, knights, knight-bachelors, esquires,
 Frank-tenants, yeomen, villeins—all men else
 Who hold their land by seizin, service, wardship,
 In capite, free-soccage, gavel-kind,
 Church-tenure, burgage-tenure, villeinage,
 Are hereby cited to do homage for them,
 Make oath of fealty, discharge their fines,
 Or else plead ousterlmain, and sue by livery,
 On St. John Baptist's Martyrdom, at noon.
(Trumpets and acclamation.)
(Geoffrey Builth, who had remained covered, advances.)

GEOFFREY.

O yes, O yes! cried lustily for heaven!
And therefore largess to the pursuivants.

(Throws them his purse.)

We thank our friends and lieges every one—
Both knights and knaves—with all our heart we thank them.
First, these our kinsmen by the father's side,
My lord of Hereford, and gentle Mahel,
Sir Humfrey Uske, Sir Giles, Saint Vallery;
Then each in his degree.

SIR HUGH.

I will not wait
For Saint John Baptist's Martyrdom at noon
To swear my fealty; but on the knee
Do homage now.—*(He kneels to Geoffrey.)*

SIR ANDREW.

I thought to be the first
Who prayed long life for Geoffrey, lord of Builth,
As Earl of Brecon too.—*(He kneels to Geoffrey.)*

FITZWALTER.

Stand up, Sir Hugh!
What ill-conceited traseries are these?
A single clown, yea even a sober one,
Were out of grace and welcome here to-day.
Three drunken jack-a-lents, at any time,
Could only mock each other. Wise Sir Andrew
Plays merry-Andrew at a burial;
And stout Sir Hugh a jester's supple-back!

GEOFFREY.

Our cousin of Hereford is cursed and crooked,
Through nothing worse than emptiness. Good sooth,
He would not eat nor drink with us! We three
Thrive better for our meat.

FITZWALTER.

A fool at noon
Is seldom much the wiser after supper—
And this buffoonery began betimes.

SIR HUGH.

Is all such service foolery, my lord?

FITZWALTER.

I am but slow at riddles, good Sir Hugh.

GEOFFREY.

Then let us help thy wits, which twice to-day

Have lacked a lighted lantern. Thus it is—
My servants wish me joy as master here,
Lord, both of Builth and Brecon—so I am—
And will be so with leave of Hereford,
Or else without it. Such I rode to church—
The heir, and lawfully the next of kin
To Bernard Newmark, buried there. As such
I sat at table in the seat he left me—
His successor, his substitute, his nephew,
His younger brother Roger Newmark's son.
The Lord of Builth is Earl of Brecon too.
Needst more illumination yet, fair coz?
Or will this serve?

FITZWALTER.

Nay truly, this will not.

At Hereford we count men's sons and daughters
As nearer kin than nephews.

GEOFFREY.

Do ye so?

At Hereford I grant it may be thus.
Ye men of Hereford dwell farther east—
Wisdom must pass you ere it get to Builth:
We catch, at best, your leavings. Hereford!
I' faith ye judge aright! Sons should stand first.
Yet stop! not all—what sort of sons? There be
Diversities among them. Some men say
That pilchards are the unlawful sons of herrings—
A kind of mules—but then subordinately—
Without inheritance. Why, look you, sirs,
I Builth have sons and daughters—Geoffrey Builth,
As yet a bachelor, has many such.
What then? My mother's nephew—here he is—
May sometime push his little kinsfolk out—
My blood, my bone, my flesh, my boys and girls—
Himself being next as heir. Indeed he may—
This Philip de Breos here.

FITZWALTER.

What of that?

GEOFFREY.

Why so?

Because their mothers missed the way to church—
Forgot the priest—were ill at making bargains.
By law, they should have had a clerk at hand
To give men nine months notice of their coming.

Mahel was ill provided for in this.
 Mine uncle Bernard seemed a careful man,
 But here his memory failed him.

COUNTESS.

Lead him hence!

Go, scourge him homewards! When the sot comes next,
 Let him be seated at the bench outside;
 And keep him fasting till we send for him.

GEOFFREY.

Special hard usage in a man's own house!
 The wine I drank to-day was mine before—
 Drawn from my flasks and barrels. Fasting too!
 Scourged homeward—sayest thou?—why, I am at home.
 Where be these beadels, mistress *What's-thy-name*?
 I would deal tenderly with every one—
 For uncle Bernard's sake, I would do so—
 But scourges on the back of Geoffrey Builth!
 Ah! ah! fair leman mine!

DE BREOS.

Have patience, sirs.

Builth claims the Earldom here as lawful heir.
 If Mahel and his sister Margaret
 Were born with wedlock's blessings overhead,
 The proofs are patent—three-and-twenty years
 Have left some records on the spot, no doubt:
 Ye have not far to look for them.

GEOFFREY.

Give room—

If this Welsh princess Nest were Newmark's wife,
 Where be the vouchers, records, contracts, pacts,
 The priests, the witnesses, the bridegroom's fellows,
 The bride's companions? Who was at the feast?
 Who kindled bonfires on the hills? Who danced?
 Who swept the marriage-chamber from mishap?
 Ye live among your people—bring them forth.
 Marriage makes such a coil when coupling great ones,
 I never could go nearer than the feast.
 When these were born to him, Earl Bernard's pate
 Was grey with more than forty years—and he
 No maiden runaway at any time.
 What need of whisperings then, and traversings,
 And kissing-corners to a man like him?
 His brother, my dead father, thought as I—
 So do these knights.

DE BREOS.

I tread on no man's heels ;
But ask for guidance to a sure belief
From written chronicles or living lips.
Let Mahel bring his proofs.

SIR ANDREW.

I say so too.

GEOFFREY.

By holy Jude, I say the same myself !
With all my heart I do subscribe to this.
Will any honest man wish more or less ?
Speak out at once, boy, like thy father's child—
So far no matter for the priest—wilt bide
By wise men's judgment, both sides pleading issue ?
Or shall we bear our difference to the king ?
Lastly, as best and shortest of the three,
Wilt call Heaven's saints to arbitrate between us,
The while we look each other in the face ?
Wilt do me right on horseback or on foot ?
There lies my gage ! (*Throws down his gauntlet.*)

MAHEL.

I will await the first,
The wise men's inquest, and rest there. To-morrow
So strange a challenge will make mirth for all ;
But now the soberer half is most perplexed.

COUNTESS.

Will it do so ? Make mirth to-morrow, will it,
That Geoffrey Builth has warned thee out of doors,—
Seized thine inheritance at one day's notice—
And called thy mother harlot ? Mirth, good sooth !
A gracious provocation to the merry !
Thyself and sister judged for bastardy—
And this sot's glove before thy face ! Why, here
He has a proof worth ten times all the rest ;
Earl Bernard's son a coward ! I do begin
To think thee what he calls thee—both sides bastard—
A beggar's changeling stolen from some ditch—
Neither his son nor mine. Stoop, thou slave !
Pick up the braggart's gauntlet ! [*Shouts from the spectators.*
Mahel ! fie !

He dares not ! look, he leaves it !

COUNTESS.

Thrust Builth out !
Who sides with me for Brecon ?

C

DE BREOS.

Prithee, stand back !

We shall have blood enough if this game speed.

One burial will beget a hundred more.

My lord of Hereford, give help !

FITZWALTER.

Stand off !

We that are sober should forbear—away !

Let both sides keep their benches. Now, De Breos,

What say'st thou ?

DE BREOS.

That we cannot end to-night,

With kicks and cuffs, a question such as this.

Prithee have patience, Geoffrey, while I speak.

Mahel by right has made the choice we gave him.

Take up thy glove, fair cousin. (*Gives him the gauntlet.*)

If we must fight,

Let us have Heaven and day-light over-head,

The grass to stand upon, and next our hearts

Iron mail as sound as they. Knighthood will blush,

If they who sat like brethren, side by side,

The earlier portion of so great a feast,

Should pelt their wine cups at each other's pates,

And end the high solemnity with knives !

Geoffrey, sit down ! My lord of Hereford,

Let us debate of this with cooler brains,

And meet again to-morrow.

FITZWALTER.

Well, Sir Philip—

I care not when we meet, or how. To-morrow ?

If ever Geoffrey's knighthood blush again,

It will to-morrow, Sir Philip de Breos.

DE BREOS.

We meet

In honor and unarmed ?

FITZWALTER.

Ay, either way.

DE BREOS.

Let us come habited as now we are.

The Earl of Hereford, Sir Michael Brace,

Sir Giles, Sir Humphrey Uske, Sir Reginald,

Will pledge their knightly faith against surprise ?

We shall have right of passage in and out ?

I dare trust all or either.

GEOFFREY.

Tarry, Fitzwalter !

This challenge of the Earldom, needs it blushes ?
Who else need blush beside thy mother-in-law ?

DE BREOS.

Peace—come away ! My lord of Hereford
Has promised us, and so have these. Good night ! [*Exeunt.*]

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A Chamber in the Castle.

The COUNTESS, *and* SIR MICHAEL BRACE, *the* SENESCHAL.

COUNTESS.

The Prior in his bed, Sir Michael Brace !
We lose the chief of all our witnesses.
Is he so sick ? Speechless since yesterday ?

SENESCHAL.

For what we want him, worse : his wits and tongue
Run every way but straight. He has been thus—
Been partly thus, since Corpus Christi wake ;
A sevensnight ere the Earl.

COUNTESS.

I heard of this :
Then let it melt away midst harder thoughts.
Well, we can do without him.

SENESCHAL.

Better, perhaps.
Baldwin may think his duty nearer payment,
And serve with greater heed. I have been bold
To hint so much—he may become our Prior,
And Luke may fill his place.

COUNTESS.

May !—ay, and shall.
There may be changes, which they guess not yet,
Both higher and farther back. For all that help
There shall be recompense. Who else, didst say !—
Since Mahel cares not for his bastardy,
'Twere better let him keep the profits of it.
Who makes the fourth ? Ralph from the buttery ?
Luke, Baldwin, and thyself—with whom beside ?

SENESCHAL.

Ralph—pantler Ralph—the foremost of the three :
His eyes do ever look which way I please ;
His skill is strongly building, bit by bit,

A buttress here and there to prop belief.
No architect nor master-mason he,
But still Ralph plumbs his level workmanlike.
All these will speak as I.

COUNTESS.

So, keep apart.

As yet I cannot tell which way to lead.
Follow me when I move. A trumpet! hark!
Prithee make haste and look for Hereford.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

*Court Yard of the Castle, partly filled with Guests, Citizens,
Yeomen, Priests, Servants, and other Spectators. A space
in front kept clear by Barnabas, Ralph, and Soldiers.*

SOLDIER.

Not look him in the face, Sir Pantler, why?
His eyes stand straight enough for such a matter.
Mahel is breathed and limbed as well as Builth:
As ready in his exercises too.
He would not quarrel at the feast, last night—
But now they both are sober.

RALPH.

Were he drunk,
And Geoffrey sober, something fair might chance:
They would be nearer matched. Beside strong limbs,
Light breath, long practice, wrestling, vaulting, tilting,
Fleetness of foot, mastery in horsemanship,
There should be two things else, Goliath of Gath—
Two better things than these.

SOLDIER.

A willing mind?

RALPH.

Stout-heartedness is one of them. Odso!
Thou dost wax great in wisdom day-by-day!
A righteous cause, the other. Geoffrey Builth
Puts man and woman underneath—dost think
A child may stop or turn him?

SOLDIER.

Heart and cause!
If these be naught in him, we shall have peace.
Thy Lord both coward and bastard, pantler Ralph?

BARNABAS.

More grace, if so, to pantler Ralph and me.
 Ralph shall stand up 'gainst any man alive,
 As one of them—the first of them—and I,
 The next to Ralph, as both.

SOLDIER.

A bastard ?

BARNABAS.

Ay—

From many generations misbegot,
 On father's side and mother's side, am I ;
 And coward scarce less than he. If Ralph gainsay me,
 Lend me thy glove, he lies ! *(Trumpets.)*

SOLDIER.

They come !—make way—

Give room enough.

Enter Geoffrey Lord of Builth, Sir Philip de Breos, Sir Andrew Fitzhaman, Sir Simon de-la-Hay, Sir Hugh, &c. on one side : Fitzwalter Earl of Hereford, The Countess Mother Margaret, Countess of Hereford, Bertha Fitzwalter, the Seneschal, Sir Reginald Saint Vallery, Sir Humfrey of Uske, &c. on the other : then apart, and after them, Mahel with Father Stephen.

GEOFFREY.

A fair and many-sorted company !
 Neat-hides and Venice velvet scout each other.
 Beside the gentle guests of yesterday,
 Burghers and craftsmen—soldiers, yeomen, friars—
 But welcome every one.

FITZWALTER.

We promised this :
 Wide gates and open ears. A toad shut up
 From air and daylight, lives a century :
 But dies when sunshine and the winds have touched it.
 So, for the most part, does a lie.

GEOFFREY.

I seek

A younger toad by almost fourscore years—
 Your lie of five-and-twenty. He shall have
 Daylight and air enough for such weak eyes.
 So patience, sirs ! Ye sup with me at even : *(to the crowd.)*
 Our bonfires will be lighted by-and-bye.

FITZWALTER.

Now for the Marshal of this challenger.

What say'st, Sir Philip de Breos ?

DE BREOS.

That I, by choice,
Would rather piece the last night's argument,
However roughly, like a broken bone,
Till time, with wiser handling, make it whole.
But needful skill and leisure both are wanting.
This we may do, my lord of Hereford—
Let us keep well abreast at setting out—
Tread tenderly awhile o'er dangerous ground—
Begin these rough roads smoothly. If we square
And jostle one another by the way,
So be it—there will be time enough.

GEOFFREY.

Well, forward !

Address thee to thy work again, good coz.
I ever hate this sharpening of the tools :
It sets my teeth on edge. Prithee, begin.

FITZWALTER.

What follows next, Sir Philip ?

DE BREOS.

The lord of Builth
Claims Brecon also, by his uncle's death,
As only lawful son of Bernard's brother—
So heir to both of them. For we shall show
That Bernard, whom we buried yesterday,
Both lived and died unmarried.

GEOFFREY.

Let them show—

This spinster widow of the man defunct,
With Mahel and his sister Margaret—
That he died married, if they can, de Breos.
The showing rests with them. Old Mother Church
Should know the babes to whom she sent her blessing,
And gave the cradle, cushion, caudle spoon.
Where be her marks upon these lambs—if hers ?
Her seals, her sacraments, her ministry ?
Where be they, lord Fitzwalter ? What says law ?
Let proof be missing when it should appear,
Justice dissolves the court, shuts to the door,
And custom takes the inheritance. Sometimes
They may tread roughly on some good man's toes ;
My soul consents not to their cruelty :
But what of that ? I cannot govern either.
An earldom's ermine makes too rich a robe
For any shoulders but the lawful ones.

DE BREOS.

The king would claim it if my cousin forbore.

GEOFFREY.

Ay, marry would he—and he will even yet
Unless the one of us may step before him.
Therefore we should make haste. He starts the last,
And shall not slip between without a buffet.
The king has longer hands, but mine are nearest :
Let him beware his knuckles. I have hold,
And I will keep it, though the Devil be king,
Or king be Devil, Sir Philip.

DE BREOS.

Let me speak.

GEOFFREY.

Thou shalt, coz, by and by. Married ! go to.
My father knew a heronshaw from a hawk.
Did these his knights believe in Bernard's marriage ?
Seven years ago they winked at it. No doubt
His children were his children—hazel-eyed,
Fair skinned, like him ; left-handed cousins they be.
As younger playfellows I loved them both.
What said I else, last night, to give offence
But that their mother sped without the priest ?
Am I drunk still ? I say it again while fasting.

SIR SIMON.

We give a double choice—take either handle :
Call up your witnesses, if such there are :
Bring vouchers for belief : bid Law be seated,
And choose the noblest here to arbitrate.
Do something which seems honest, what ye please.

SIR ANDREW.

Else arm and mount the claimants. Let them meet
As best beseems their place and ancestry.

GEOFFREY.

This Mahel when a boy surpassed his fellows.
What lets him now to look me in the face ?
Is his heart faint ? Well, bring his proxy then.
Choose one amongst so many, whom ye will.
Builth cares not for degrees in soldiership :
Prince, earl, or baron, down to lusty Hodge ;
He likes the bravest best. (*Builth throws down his gauntlet.*)

(*Cries from the spectators.*)

Mahel ! up with it !

Ah, craven-hearted ! will he let it lie ?
He turns away ! he dares not !

MAHEL.

True, I dare not.
There is another witness that I dare not,
More feared than Geoffrey Buith or such as ye.
His curse against blood-guiltiness affrights me—
The ever-during wrath which follows pride
Forewarned of him, but heedless. Better to creep,
A fugitive and vagabond on earth,
Without his mark and sentence, to the grave,
Than carry both so far, and one beyond it.
Therefore it is I dare not. Shame like this,
If sharp as death, is milder than remorse!
Geoffrey has so far justice on his side—
He asks for proofs against his own belief:
He challenges what older men think his,
That which his father taught him, which his knights
Believed, and still believe. If breath alone
May quench this flame at once, or blow it out,
Supply the proofs he calls for—shut his mouth,
And shame his wiser servants; shall we spare it
Because his gauntlet lies upon the ground?

GEOFFREY.

By sun and moon, there is no more to do.
Sir Philip de Breos went foremost of the three;
I kept awhile behind him, then abreast him:
Mahel spurs past us both the self-same way.
He pleads against his earldom mightily!
Bless thee, fair kinsman! As I hope to thrive,
'Twere better fight with any man alive,
Or any other maid.

COUNTESS.

A man, dost say?
That pleads against his mother, sister, self,
His honor, name and lineage—all through fear!
Just now, he styled himself a vagabond.
This man of thine, who makes me face my judges,
To clear his sister's birth from bastardy!
We shall be talked to soon of beadles' whips:
The strumpet's penance must begin with tears!
My son is doubtful which of these to call me,
His father's wife or harlot!—Gentle knights,
Sir Philip de Breos, Sir Simon de la Hay,
Sir Humfrey, Andrew, Michael, Reginald—
The topmost plumes of England's chivalry—
I thought myself a Countess yesterday.

Which of you whispered *no* in Newmark's ear?
 Who called me harlot while he lived to hear you?
 You set my cup beside me, carved my meat,
 And rode bare-headed at my bridle-rein.
 Knights should not kneel before a concubine:
 Ye knelt both going forth and coming home.
 Who called me harlot to him then? By Christ,
 Ye dared not speak it, think it, dream it, sirs!
 I say ye dared not, knights and noblemen.
 To both the factions, Builth's and mine, I say it.
 Your spurs had left your heels, the hangman's axe
 Had spared this presence here, and answered for me.
 Now that I am a widow, I must quit!
 Your late lord's kinsman thrusts me out of doors!
 I plead before his servants here! His son
 Asks witnesses for conscience' sake—he is
 A gosseller, what not! The vagabond!
 I must bring hither contracts, vouchers, pacts,
 Or blush, and own myself a concubine.
 Nay, by my soul's best hope, I will not do it.
 Let him maintain his birthright if he please.
 My honor and his sister's take their chance—
 So shall his earldom too. Why should I care
 Whether the braggart or the craven get it?

SPECTATORS.

Bravely! Ah, Mahel! hollow heart!

FITZWALTER.

Look up—

Do thyself right and us.

MAHEL.

Right rests with Builth

Of reclamation 'gainst apparent wrong
 While we hold back the proofs.

MARGARET.

Brother! a coward!

BERTHA.

Dost thou not hear thy mother? Take the glove;
 Ah! fie upon thee, craven! Sunk to this!
 Lost every way!

FITZWALTER.

Bethink thee yet.

MAHEL.

I do.

FITZWALTER.

Lift up the gage then—wake!

COUNTESS.

Faint-hearted traitor !

BERTHA.

Is death so hard as this is? Shame upon thee !

COUNTESS.

Thou chalk-faced idiot—take the gauntlet up !

Why dost thou gasp and tremble thus ?

STEPHEN.

Forbear !

And let me speak.

COUNTESS.

Peace, whisperer ! Thou hast spoken
What rusts and rots his heart. Drive the priest hence—
Away with him ! *(Stephen is forced off.)*

FITZWALTER.

Dost own thyself so base ?
Thou wilt not raise it ? Then I will. *(Takes up the glove.)*
Till now

I had no right to it. His place is void.
Two noble ladies stand impeached by Builth ;
My mother-in-law and wife—as harlot, bastard—
This slave renounces them. Being next of kin,
I say that Geoffrey lies.

CROWD.

Bravely again !

Huzza for Hereford !

SIR REGINALD.

Had I ten swords
All should maintain their quarrel.

SIR HUMFREY.

My single one
Is freely theirs.

SENECHAL.

And mine.

SIR GILES.

And so is mine.

GEOFFREY.

I take the stakes all round. Sir Philip, forbear !
I will not lose the lightest of the five.
It is my game—stand back, de Breos !—by Jude !
I fain would play it out with half a score !
When shall we meet, Fitzwalter ? What's to-day ?
We may bring arms by Tuesday next. At noon
I will dine here with wife and mother-in-law,
Ending our buffet first.

SIR SIMON.

For lawful lists

The king must grant his warranty.

GEOFFREY.

What need?

SIR SIMON.

Already I stand Builth's sponsor three times pledged,
As one of three, for more than half I have.
His Grace has tightly tethered all our legs,
And we must wait the loosing.

GEOFFREY.

Wait! Not I.

He may come first, Sir Simon de la Hay.

SIR SIMON.

I heed not, so he frees me from my bail.

GEOFFREY.

Wait! what a month?

SIR SIMON.

Haply two months or three.

My Lord of Hereford and Geoffrey Builth,
I hereby cite you both before the king
To keep his peace. I cared not for the boy—
No fear lest he should break it! Men are ye,
And dangerous both.

GEOFFREY.

Then let Fitzwalter bide

At Hereford the while, as I will here.
Tarry for leave a month or two? I will
Keep in, or get in, as I may!

COUNTESS.

Peace both!

Throw down the gauntlet, Milo; let it lie—
Thou shall not fight for truth against herself,
Nor run toward honor blindfold, Hereford.
Foul breath, the wind behind us, harms us not.
Sir Philip de Breos and Builth may laugh their fill—
Mahel is not the Earl. When he was born,
His father was not married. Loose the gage—
Now for the mountebank and clown.

MARGARET.

My Mother!

COUNTESS.

Ay, verily, so great a thing as that!
So much even still she is! Mother to Margaret!

Nor over proud of being so.

SIR ANDREW.

Vallery's sword,

Was lent to chastity.

DE BREOS.

A maiden loan,

No danger to its innocence.

SIR ANDREW.

It will

Need little grinding through its too much use.

SIR HUGH.

Sir Humfrey spake but once, and then amiss.

GEOFFREY.

I will be friends with every one of them.

DE BREOS.

We scarce have room to buffet one another,
While hunted truth lies panting on the ground.

GEOFFREY.

Marry, we have her now by both the ears,
And the brush too—this nimble-footed vermin—
At last ran fairly out of breath. Some kinds
Do stand, like bears, upon their hinder parts,
Ugly great-hearted truths—with ready paw,
Who will not budge from hottest questioners.
Others, when hardly pressed, go down the wind
Carrying their scent before them, badger-like.
Then dodge from brake to brake, or double back,
Take ground and must be delved for. Such is this.
But now that we have caught her, let us hold her,
And all be merry again.

DE BREOS.

She may not love

Such handling well enough for merriment.

GEOFFREY.

There shall be no change here which is not good.
Our cousin of Hereford must dwell content ;
Fitzwalter will ride homeward. Geoffrey Builth
Has Brecon superadded. Gentle Mahel—
A godly and a peaceful youth he is—
Shall pray for all of us, mine Almoner,
With staff and signet-ring, anointed, shaven ;
Within a month the Prior Saint of John—
He that is now such cannot hold a sevensnight.

SIR ANDREW.

And Mahel's mother?

GEOFFREY.

Shall fare best of all.

What wouldst thou have to do with Mahel's mother?
Yea, by my Halidame! if minded so
She may be profitted by that which changes,
And that which needs no changing—both ways lucky.
Mine uncle Bernard's years were threescore odd—
Mine own are something more than half so many:
Say thirty-six or seven. Her's scarce midway
Betwixt the two, and borne without a flaw,
Borne bravely so far, as I live by bread!
Fitzhaman still runs first to look for strays;
But she shall dwell at Brecon here with me,
And fill the house with younger Mahels, Margarets.
Sometimes the latter math exceeds the crop.
I will maintain 'gainst him and Christendom,
That no man's flower is fairer than my fruit,
Ripe fruit, Sir Philip.

DE BREOS.

A challenge! for how long?

GEOFFREY.

Till over ripe. Be provident, fair coz,
A fagot of dry goss may stop a gap.
I need not think to marry yet, I hope—
Not yet, de Breos!

COUNTESS.

They have had space enough,
With time and leave, to try their archery;
Void butts and ample target. One aims wide;
The rest, with all their might, shoot scarce half-way.
Let them choose stronger bows and longer shafts,
Then prove their little skill a second time.
There is a sequel to this history:
Its consequence leaped first, and out of place,
To meet its provocations. What speaks now
May call its witnesses from standers-by.
I came to Brecon—how? Who brought me hither?
Whence came I, gentle knights? At what an age?
Some here have heard so much at least, Sir Hugh—
Was then amongst the pages. I was carried
By those who left my father's house in flames;
A child and captive, but a princess too,
And so esteemed till womanhood. Thus long

Your late Lord's sister had the care of me.
Small room for choice, I trow. A hostage still,
How might I marry? While my father lived—
Against his will—against reproof of kin—
Bestow me with his enemy? If marriage
Be sacramental spousals, law would void,
And holy Church prohibit such a pact.
They both allow betrothals, wedlock's pledges,
Its sacredness, its purity, its truth.
All that we lacked, at first, were priestly blessings,
And these not long: nor matrimonial faith,
Its vows and mysteries at any time.
This noble sister's presence, as I thought,
Outweighed ten priests. I should believe so still,
But that you heart-sick craven is a curse,
And seems a punishment.

GEOFFREY.

Well, you and I
Will leave the vows and learn the mysteries.
So, prithee be brief. Ye cared not for the priest:—
What next befel? how then?

COUNTESS.

He cared for us,
When peace had swept the hindrances aside,
In giving needful form to what had been
As well without it, but for that.

GEOFFREY.

Ay! when?

COUNTESS.

Two years before the birth of Margaret.
Her right is clear both this and every way.
Fitzwalter is the earl on her behalf—

GEOFFREY.

What priest?

COUNTESS.

The prior.

GEOFFREY.

Sick! speechless! dying! who else?

COUNTESS.

Your aunt, Earl Bernard's sister.

GEOFFREY.

Dead as Eve!

COUNTESS.

The prince, my father.

GEOFFREY.

That, and something worse !

He would be long in coming whence he is.

Give us a lively witness—let him bide.

COUNTESS.

I know not who—some seven or eight were there—

Too many by half for what we wanted them.

A second marriage might disprove the first ;

This pigeon-livered knave was then the heir,—

We wished to keep him such.

GEOFFREY.

I fain would hear

One witness yet unburied.

SENESCHAL *comes forward.*

So you shall.

I saw this second marriage.

GEOFFREY.

How long since ?

SENESCHAL.

At least, not less than one-and-twenty years.

We keep no reckoning by the almanac.

Being page, at that time, to the Earl deceased,

I followed with the grooms.—Live witnesses ?

There were two priests or three, beside the prior.

FRIAR BALDWIN *comes forward.*

Lo, one is here. If challenged for the time,
I should have guessed some eight or ten months earlier.

FRIAR LUKE *comes forward.*

As Sacristan, I tended on the lights.

RALPH *comes forward.*

And I kept shut the door—my back against it—

But hard beset, and with a deal to do.

Brides-people—what ! but eight ? Who tells me so ?

No more than seven or eight ? Why, ten were there—

The little lord himself was there.

GEOFFREY.

Who ? Mahel ?

Rare luck for him to see his mother married !

How old didst say he was ?

RALPH.

How old ? A year—

He scarce might stand untended on his feet,

But then the nurse's finger held him up—

Her little finger was enough. Good sooth,

She would come in ! she needs must see the wedding !
Saving this presence here, I got a kiss,
The porter's fee, from both of them.

GEOFFREY.

This drought
Ends in a flood which drowns us all ! Who else ?
Three groats would buy such fagotted by scores.
Another whispering to the last ! out with him !
That piebald-pated Lazer—bring him forth !
He with his mouth ajar.—A censer-swinger—
Bell-ringer's deputy, or some such clerk—
He too, past doubt, was one of them. What sayest ?
—Come forward, Patch, and tell us what thou art.

BARNABAS.

A second-handed prophet.

GEOFFREY.

Canst foresee ?

BARNABAS.

What Merlin did foresee, I can interpret.

GEOFFREY.

Then give me better luck, and let us hear thee.

BARNABAS.

*The bloody hand casts off its glove ;
The carrion crow has hatched a dove ;
The eagle flown, a kite comes down ;
A flake of snow a lady's vow—
A lie can buy a silver chain—
A saint match Satan three to one—
So Ralph shall be the chamberlain,
And Baldwin Prior of Saint John.*

(Exit.)

GEOFFREY.

Some one run after him, and bring him back—
Cry largess in his ear.

COUNTESS.

We wrong our patience.

One witness was required, and here are four.
I stay no longer questions. Clear the ground—
Drive these knaves home again, Sir Michael Brace.

FITZWALTER.

I claim the earldom on my wife's behalf.

CROWD.

Brecon and Hereford ! huzza ! he has it !

D

FITZWALTER.

Let Builth the challenger release his bail,
Then meet me singly or with whom he will.
I hold his gage till Christmas come.

GEOFFREY.

So long?

Thou shalt be fain to yield both glove and Brecon
By this day month, my Lord of Hereford,
Or Christmas cheer will scarcely keep thee warm.
Good-bye mine uncle's widow doubly married,
Therefore no maid, and yet no wife withal.
Keep smiles and kisses till I come for them—
We shall not tarry long. *(Exit with his Knights.)*

CROWD.

Ah! down with Builth!

The Countess Margaret! Welcome, lady! welcome!

COUNTESS.

Take logs and fagots, be they whose they may:
To-morrow we will pay the loan of them.
Build bonfires till they overlook your roofs,
And, good Sir Michael, find them beeves to roast.

SENESCHAL.

Our barrels will run down the borough streets
Ere they be ready with their stoups.

COUNTESS.

Make haste!

No stint to-night.

(Countess, led out by Fitzwalter, passes Mahel.)

COUNTESS.

Well, what art waiting for?

A bastard token of my harlotry?

Bethink thee of thy choice and calling, child—

Thrust out the vagabond! *(Exit.)*

MAHEL.

What! Margaret too!

(Margaret passes.)

Will she pass misery by without a look?

My sister! Fare thee well then! Canst not give

So small a wish as this for what I leave thee,

And bid God's peace at parting? Take my place—

But say farewell.

MARGARET.

Be gone to Hereford!

Spur sharper than this shame to hide thyself.

I will send after thee—so now away !
What hast thou left, or canst leave, but disgrace ?
O, Mahel—fie upon thee !

MAHEL.

Hear me speak !

MARGARET.

A craven's sister ! Bernard Newmark's child—
Fitzwalter's wife—appeached of bastardy !
The son forsake his mother ! God forgive thee !
I rather would be what I thought myself,
Than what I am with all on this side heaven.
Take horse to Hereford.

(Exit.)

MAHEL.

That spark goes out !

It was the last I reckoned on to light me.

Fitzwalter's sister loves not like mine own. *(Bertha passes.)*

BERTHA.

Margaret can neither love so much nor hate.

MAHEL.

Then for the sake of that which once has been,
One moment see and hear me.

BERTHA.

To what end ?

MAHEL.

Not such as love might dream of. Hope is past—
But see and hear me, Bertha !

BERTHA.

For the sake

Of what I thought thee once—nay, think thee still—
For pity's sake—thy sister's sake—mine own—
Pray God I yet may see once again !
See thee where shame and mockery grieve us not—
Scorn, if it follow, cannot reach to harm us—
The hiss drops short, and cries of Traitor ! Coward !
Make the pale face no paler ! I would see thee—
—That mine own eyes may witness so much good—
Where pity may be blameless ;—see thee safe,
Escaped the chidings of this infamy ;—
But may God's grace forbid I ever should
While both of us can hear how loud it is !

(She turns to the crowd, and draws a ring from her finger.)

Look this way, gentle friends ! Among so many,
There will be some fair neatherd, goatherd, swineherd
Affianced since Saint Vallentine or Yule,

D 2

Who only wants a ring to bind his Madge :
With wishes for its happier speed, take this.

(Throws the ring amongst them, and exit.)

FIRST CROWD.

Who caught it, Giles ? hold fast, Bartholomew !

SECOND CROWD.

It never touched the ground.

THIRD CROWD.

The better luck !

RALPH.

Her luck is getting loose from such an owl.
Ah ! hollow-heart ! out with him through the gate !

FIRST CROWD.

Hands off him, Jacob !

RALPH.

Weaver, get behind !

Drive out the runaway !

SECOND CROWD.

Nay, spare to strike !

THIRD CROWD.

Well, let him go then.—Thrust him with the staff !

RALPH.

Help Builth against his mother !

FIRST CROWD.

Let him loose !

Deal gently with him, Judeth !

THIRD CROWD.

Bastard ! Craven !

Halloo ! he flies !

*(Mahel looks, for a moment, at the Towers—and then
rushes out—followed by the crowd.)*

SCENE III.

Chamber in the Castle.

FATHER STEPHEN and BARNABAS.

BARNABAS.

Leave wringing of the hands and counting rafters !
What wouldst thou with me, father ? Here I am.
Didst send to find a comforter ? Go to :

Let us sit down, that we may sum the cost
Of making capons for this world of cocks,
This huge and smoking dunghill, whereupon
The strongest beak and sharpest spur speed best.
Thy chicken's-legs were tethered shrovetide-wise :
So Geoffrey Builth has plucked his feathers off.
Woe worth the while, good father ! Thou didst light
The fire which boiled his little heart to broth !
Thy doctrine sweated valour fairly out,
Exhaling soul and manhood drop by drop.
Take comfort of me, father !

STEPHEN.

May He grant it
Who hears and pities misery ! That poor child
Had patience while the rabble chased him forth—
Whooped, hissed, and cursed him through the howling
streets—
And I have none ! They hunted him about !
They grudged a refuge at his father's grave,
And thrust him from the church !

BARNABAS.

Friar Baldwin did.

STEPHEN.

Haply he thought of malice fiercer still,
And so found patience. God forgive me, faithless !
I shall go mad ! The same had thronged his heels
Bareheaded while their caps were cast toward heaven,
With shouts and songs, returning from the field ;
Yea, though their neighbour's bones were left behind him ;
Themselves nor eased nor profited ! His hands
Were bloodless and employed in doing good—
Therefore they hissed and cursed him ! Hear me, son.
I cannot follow him—I am shut in ;
The Seneschal has closed the gates upon me.
Seek fitter garments for his state and need :
Hide him from farther malice : keep thou near him.
Nay, tarry not ! bethink thee where he is !
As thou shalt hope for mercy—show me this.

BARNABAS.

We two will do our best for one another.
I take thy place as preacher—so farewell !
If I can bring him back to face his mother,
Or fight a main with Geoffrey Builth, I will.

(Exeunt.)

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A River, and on the side opposite, a Ferry-boat.

MAHEL and BARNABAS.

MAHEL.

What name and office, say'st thou?

BARNABAS.

Barnabas—

The son of consolation.

MAHEL.

Boat, ahoy!

Help me to wake this ferryman.

BARNABAS.

Do cooks

Bake larger warden-pies, with greater heed,
On that side than on this, for love of beggars?
Why should we cross the river? Think'st to freight
The boat thyself, without thy miseries?
Do cowards flock eastward out of heart and breath?
Or do the mis-begotten address them thither?
All cuckoo-kind of creatures congregate
For incubation near the rising sun,
To hatch them phœnixes from addled eggs?
Why should we cross this ferry?

MAHEL.

I would have,
Between us two, as wide a stream as this,
To keep thee out of hearing. Boat! ahoy!
I need it but for one of us.

BARNABAS.

My wits

Are scarce so light and loosely-packed as thine:
Yet such an evocation might undo me,
And blow them where thy fortunes fled before.
Thou hast a windy heritage—strong breath
Wherewith to cool thy sister's husband's porridge,
The while he keeps his hand upon the spoon.

With entrails small as mine, through lack of use,
A grasshopper could ill digest the dew,
And he might shout as lustily.

MAHEL.

Boat! ho!

BARNABAS.

For which of us? and what dost call thyself?
Thy name, though air, is like thy patrimony,
Friends, kinsmen, servants, sister, mother, wife,
Too great a thing, and much too good for thee,
Though air be next to nothing.

MAHEL.

I have cast
All these behind me, and since then have spared
My cloak to barer misery than mine own.
Now to be nothing is the best choice left me:
My greatest grief is ever to have been!
Why strip me of my patience too?

BARNABAS.

I need,

As follower to so pitiful a lord,
A double share of it.

MAHEL.

Why follow me?

BARNABAS.

A masterless dog soon tires of liberty.
The whole world is at war with him. It needs
I follow some one. He that was, at last,
Thy lady mother's husband, as she says,
Though not in time for honesty, did garnish
Small commendations with a world of kicks.
Thy sister's husband, with his double earldom,
May double entertainment such as this,
Nor look for recompense. While Geoffrey Buith
In such wise deals his bounties as a king.
Be it but for conscience' sake, to render back
Hereditary charities like these,
I fain would follow thee.

MAHEL.

Boat, ferryman!

BARNABAS.

He doth mistake thee for his next of kin,
So neither owns nor hears thee.

MAHEL.

Should he cross,
He bears thee back upon thine own report :
Dogs pay no toll. My wealth will scarcely quit
The transport of a man. I shall bide here.

BARNABAS.

A man or less, had bided still at Brecon.
Our shadows may precede, may follow us,
May walk beside us—but not go without us.
In things the least substantial, I present
A body 'twixt the light and thy poor spirit.

MAHEL.

What things?

BARNABAS.

Our birth and ancestry. As thus thou hadst
One father at the most, and he most doubtful :
But one, I say, at best. Thy lady-mother
Guessed thy gestation loosely: she could make
No nearer reckoning than of eighteen months.
Nor is she sure of thee—if his indeed.
Some two or three and twenty years ago,
She had, she thinks, a son by somebody :
She partly does believe she had. Behold,
Two nations have a part in Barnabas,
And thirteen townships! His descent is not
From twenty ancestors filed one by one;
But twice as many fathers altogether.
His lady-mother's memory was not tasked
Whether she had a husband, but which was he.

MAHEL.

Boat! hilla ho!

FERRYMAN, *from the opposite side.*

Who calls me? what dost crave?

BARNABAS.

My breakfast, dinner, supper—two days owing—
All these are in arrear to me.

FERRYMAN.

Gramercy
Thou should'st make haste, with such a deal to do!
When all are ended, I will bring the boat.

MAHEL.

The one of us is ready now—take me.

FERRYMAN.

It were a sin, and scarce worth while, to part you.

BARNABAS.

How many dost thou count us at? Hast got
Thy tallies for the reckoning? We stand here,
One lord, one knave, two vagabonds, two fools,
As many cowards and bastards, one great saint,
And one who fasts enough to make him such.

FERRYMAN.

Except the saint, we have of every sort—
And him we must not covet. Let him bide
To teach the others patience. [*Exit Ferryman.*]

MAHEL.

By this light,
The thought to quoit thee half-way after him,
Is over hot!

BARNABAS.

Beware to caulk with wrath
The vessel of thy sanctity, and daub
Its seams with malice, lest combustion follow.
The single property between us two
In which my state proves farthest off from grace,
Is this of godliness. My name is best,
And best endures to own itself. My wealth
Is amplest by a cloak with hare-skin lining:
Our ancestry has been debated of:
My wisdom stands its ground against rebuke:
My valour never ran away from Fortune,
Nor lost an earldom through its lack of heart:
No lady-love has called her favors from me,
Nor lady-mother turned me out of doors:
How great soe'er the occasion, neither yet
Has ever blushed for me or for herself.
Let me speak truth—I do weigh lightest here!
Among ten thousand mothers, are there ten
With grace enough to stand, as thine has done,
'Midst servants, kinsfolk, children, enemies,
And claim the credit of concubinage?
Make honor out of harlotry? Alas,
Such love for truth is rare!

MAHEL, *beating him.*

Cat's face, take that!

And that! thou hast had notice of them.

BARNABAS.

Hold!

I was constrained to take, but will not keep them. (*beats Mahel.*)

MAHEL.

We now shall know whose bounty spends the most.

BARNABAS.

Prithee forbear !

MAHEL.

Wilt swim the river, Patch ?

BARNABAS.

Withdraw thine hands from off my throat ! let go !
May palsy prove the warmest of thy friends,
And shake them from the wrists ! By Dunstan's shoe,
I do suspect thee now of treachery !
No coward at all ! I have been snared to this !
Nor coward nor bastard, perhaps ! Thou dost fight best
Beneath fictitious banners ! Boat, a hoy !
Let us be quits and part.

MAHEL.

Away with thee !

BARNABAS.

The brave have beaten me by right of nature ;
The doubtful sometimes on their own report—
Never a coward confessed till now ! Good sooth,
I shall begin to think thee wise as well !
Better beat me than Geoffrey !—have I said
One word which he did not ?

MAHEL.

Speak of myself,

I heed not how—all things with human voice
Are licensed thus—pies, starlings, poppinjays,
Nay, even such warped and strained resemblances
To much-abused humanity as thou.
Coward, bastard, fugitive—I am a post
For every cur to stop at—do thou rail,
And I will strive to help thee. Honor's scorn,
Love's reprobation, manhood's laughing stock,
A briar to tear remembrance, him earth loathes,
And heaven may find no pity for !—Mine ears
Will cease, at last, to ring with infamy.
Deal thou as all men else do— spare them not ;
Only forbear my mother.

BARNABAS.

All men else

Do not forbear thy mother ; what am I
To over-rule her witness of herself ?
Rebutt so great a lady ? Art ashamed ?

Our large fraternity of runaways
Will doubt about such membership as thine.
Thou art not resolute in cowardice,
Nor thorough-bred in bastardy!

MAHEL.

One dog,
From many better fed, has left the fire
And so far followed me. I pelt him home
Where faith is hateful for its singleness,
And every foot shall spurn him!

BARNABAS.

Dost repent?

Art sorry?

MAHEL.

Ay.

BARNABAS.

Wilt keep thine hands in peace?

MAHEL.

Henceforth I will—but get beyond their reach.
Choose up the stream, or down it, or across—
I travel any way which thou dost not.

BARNABAS.

Yet take good counsel with thee.

MAHEL.

There is left
So much of gold as makes so small a token. (*gives a ring.*)
Bear this to Brecon. She whose pledge it was
Will be thine advocate in recompense,
And pay thee its escape from shameful hands.
Give it as snatched and rescued—let it seem
Not sent, but yielded—say the lost has left it.
Thou shalt be thanked for bearing it.

BARNABAS.

Unless

She chance to love the dog above his master,
Her recompense may reach him near the tail.
Lend me thy staff and let me help myself.

MAHEL.

Take both, and peace go with thee.

BARNABAS.

Peace should keep
Her knuckles off my throat, and so be welcome:
Fain would I leave thee patience in exchange.
Thy mother's multitude of sins requires

Such ample skirts with which to cover them,
That charity must strip herself and starve.
But while mine eyes forbear her nakedness,
Wilt list to some last words?

MAHEL.

Ay.

BARNABAS.

Dost promise?

MAHEL.

I do on these conditions.

BARNABAS.

By what pledge?

MAHEL.

My faith and honour!

BARNABAS.

O! may all the saints

Cherish so choice a plant, and help its growth!

A medlar grafted on thy modesty!

They needs must marvel at its fruits of late!

I have known honor used like saffron crust

To hide a stinking paste underneath—

Have known it girt with protestations round,

Like threads of tow about a linseed poultice,

To keep the air from cowardice and fraud.

But such a guarantee exceeds experience!

Swear by thy mother's love and chastity—

Thy lady's faith—thy wisdom, manhood, fortune;

Or give a mortgage on thy whole estate!

Thou wilt forbear me? I have been beset

By art and circumvention—hence distrust

Thy cowardice as much as most men's valour—

Pawn me a saint, wilt keep thy hands at rest?

MAHEL.

Ay—say and do thy pleasure.

BARNABAS.

So I will.

It is an oath! regard it heedfully!

Faith, honor, and the holy Saints to boot!

Take that and that. *(beats him with his staff.)* V
stand still!

Ah, fie upon thee, reprobate! thine oath!

Tarry within my reach till I have done—

Fie! wolf's-paw! no evasion! keep thy groud

What! wouldst forswear thyself!—Yea, turr

But no retraction, sir ! A beast am I
To tie the withes of conscience round thine arms,
And leave thy legs untethered !

(King Gryffeth rides up armed ; he dismounts.)

Hold ! stand back :

Let loose the weapon from thine hand ! forbear !
I say, down with it ! If my wrath arise
I smite thee to my feet ! Away ! dost hear ?
Forbear the youth.

BARNABAS.

Your knightship quits the thief
To catch the constable. I do stand still—
'Tis he that runs away so fast.

KING.

What sayest ?

A thief ? Is he a thief ? By this right hand,
Never was seen so strange a sight as this !
What might he take from thee beside thy fleas ?
A spectacle so marvellous !

BARNABAS.

As what ?

A man that runs away ?—if so, then never
Your knightship has run after one— which shows
That greasy-winded valour lives at ease.

KING.

As there is light from heaven, I have in heart
To hang thee, like a coney, by the heels !
Take heed and lay the finger on thy lip—
The ground beneath thy feet is mine. Speak truth !
Is he a thief ? Thy son, didst say he is ?
If peradventure so, he fled in duty—
Is the boy thine—thou hedge-pig ? speak to me—

BARNABAS.

I know not that he is.

KING.

Come hither, boy ! *(to Mahel.)*

Knot thou the horse's rein to yonder tree.
Thou dead-cat, is he thine ?

BARNABAS.

He may be so.

He may be peradventure so—

KING.

Whose else ?

BARNABAS.

Nay—not his mother's—this at least is sure—

She has disclaimed him. If he had been mine
He would have fled his vows before his father.
I have no heart to own him—whether or no.

KING.

Then, by my head, whose is he? Tell the king
Whose son he is.

BARNABAS.

The king may claim and take him.
I wash my hands of him. He is a stray
On nature's waste.

KING.

A natural? Is it true?
Now, by the bread I eat, a full-moon fool!
And he so strong of limb too! Can he talk?
A stately fool! wondrous well grown and featured!
What dost thou feed upon? And where dost sleep?
Come hither to me, innocent. Speak truth—
What meat dost eat? speak wisely.

MAHEL.

I did eat
Ripe whortle-berries yesterday, to-day
Pig-nuts and hazel-nuts. My bed last night
Was where the fern grows yonder.

KING.

Why didst quarrel?
What ground of strife?

BARNABAS.

There was no quarrel.

KING.

How?

BARNABAS.

The last had been made up.

KING.

Then why didst smite him?

BARNABAS.

He is a coward.

KING.

Ay, truly is he so!
He is indeed! good sooth, thou dost speak truly!
What next? how then?—didst therefore beat him thus
Because he is a coward?

BARNABAS.

Does your grace

Believe my wit so small that I should beat him
If he were not ?

KING.

A coward ? come hither, fool—
Thou shalt lift up thy face before the sun,
And fight against him. Shake thyself, awake !
Stand bravely to him, innocent ! Behold,
A king shall be thy squire ! Thou dost o'ertop
That pie-bald pate of his a span and half ;
Thy hip is well-nigh level with his beard ;
And shalt thou run away from him ? Take heart !
A brave and stately fool he is !

BARNABAS.

A fool

To run away from me, but not a brave one.

KING.

By this right hand, he shall be justified !
Stop awhile first, boy ?

BARNABAS.

He must needs do that,
Or run from victory a second time.
I care not for his stopping—let him bide
Till christmas, if he will.

KING.

Art coward too ?

BARNABAS.

Ay, marry, am I. Were your grace as brave
As I am not, we might see great things some day.

KING.

A coward ! As light and darkness come from heaven,
Never was found the man that said so yet !
Hark ye ! stand still ! forbear awhile ! speak truth !
Hast seen my servant here ? do thou speak first—
A noble at the ferry ?

BARNABAS.

I have seen

A ragged sort of lord without his cloak.

KING.

Armed, magpie—mounted—captain of the host—
The chief of all my servants ! Prince ap Rhys !
He rides with head on high above his crupper :
His greaves are brass : upon his targe he bears
A black bull chained and fetlocked.

BARNABAS.

Bears a bull?

A mighty beast for such a little field!

KING.

Graven, I say—upon his shield, thou snake!

I did say graven: by my father's head

I will be quits with thee! Look this way, fool—

Said I not graven on his shield? Behold,

On mine are lions!

MAHEL.

Seven of them!

KING.

Canst count

MAHEL.

The first is bigger than the six behind.

KING.

They typify the kings that rule Caermarthen:

The mightiest is myself.

MAHEL.

They all wear crowns,

And all do run one way!

KING.

Ay—wherefore do they?

It tokens love and unanimity.

I go before the rest, as first and greatest.

MAHEL.

Why do ye chain the bull, and loose the lions?

But be they lions indeed?

KING.

What else didst think?

MAHEL.

A nest of conies, with their dam before.

BARNABAS.

A she-goat—I—and followed by her kids.

KING.

Peace, thou flayed badger's peltry!

MAHEL.

Hark! a cry!

BARNABAS.

The black bull, by his bellowing! here he is.

Enter Prince Jestin ap Rhys, armed. He dismounts and kneels.

KING.

Stand on thy feet, Prince Jestin. What dost bring me?

Give me thy tidings presently, ap Rhys.
 The king comes first, and tarries for his servant !
 The king consorts with lazars ! Is it good ?
 Beggars that lie o' nights amongst the fern ;
 And fight, like noblemen, without a cause ?
 Is this thing good, prince Jestin ? Shout, thou fool !
 Cry till the earth do quake beneath thy feet ;
 Thou godless innocent ! Cry, both of ye—
 The king commands the ferryman ! Now speak.
(Over ! over ! over !)
 What answer from my cousins, prince ap Rhys ?
 Good news shall be requited. What says Gwinneth ?
 Thou shalt have gold for silver in exchange.
 Now, where is he and Killan ?

PRINCE.

Both a-foot.

Pencarr passed round the mountains yesterday :
 The kings his uncle and his son-in-law
 Had crossed above Llangaddoc toward Penbrain.
 My servants travel northward through the land,
 By Aberath, Treegarron, Pentadarroc,
 To speak your grace's pleasure. I spurred fast,—
 But lo, the king before me ! There will meet
 Six princes, with their hosts, at Brecon gate
 By dawn of day to-morrow.

KING.

I say, seven !

As breath is life, we two will ride apace !
 Seven kings there will be, if I live all night.
 This thou shalt see, prince Jestin. Thou shalt need
 No ladder for the battlements, ap Rhys.
 The king shall go before thee. Old men say
 Words dropped by chance may turn to prophecies :
 And these were thine. I would not go behind
 For half Caermarthen. As we live by bread,
 No man shall see my back.

BARNABAS.

The king must go

The last of all then.

KING.

Wherefore, Beelzebub ?

Lazars that sleep amongst the fern—ap Rhys !
 Their meat is hips and haws, with such like picking.
 Lay thou thy finger on thy lip ! The bards
 Do travel with the heralds in the host,

E

To see what they shall witness and record.
Hear the king speak, prince Jestin! Hold thy peace!
Our horsemen are as forward as the first:
Clydoge and Gryffeth lead them by the fords—
The foot come this way presently, ap Rhys:
I pricked before to meet thee. I would bring
No listeners with me hither. Now, prince Jestin,
The king repays thy tidings gold for brass!
We have had messengers from Geoffrey Builth
Who yields us all that lies this side Trecastle—
All that we asked he yields us! Art required?
Are the news good, ap Rhys? Seven kings shall aid
This Geoffrey Builth to win his kinsman's earldom;
And then, to take it from him, one another.
As there is truth above, thou shalt not find
One Northman, nor one Saxon, west of Wye
On this day month.

PRINCE.

Both ferries are cut off.

We have an easier road and abler horses—
But we must spur all night. Earl Bernard's son
Is chased from Brecon by his brother-in-law—
Fitzwalter holds the Earldom through his wife,
This bastard's sister.

KING.

By my father's head,
And by my own, I will have both these Earldoms—
I will have Hereford as well, ap Rhys—
And Builth I will have! Whither is he fled?—
The son convinced of bastardy?

PRINCE.

To Builth—

To Geoffrey Builth, his late competitor.
But first, upon his father's grave he knelt,
And swore before the altar of Saint John,
That ere he polled his beard, or tasted bread,
Or slept, or loosed the sandals from his feet,
His hands should hang his mother.

KING.

So they shall!

This bastard shall have leave to hang his mother,
And I will hang the bastard. Hold thy peace!
No man shall pity either. Princess Nest
Is traitress to her kindred, prince ap Rhys—
And look, to hang one's mother is a sin.

Lift up thy voice, and shout again, thou fool !
 Cry loudly to this ferryman. I would
 Have passage for myself before the host—
 So lift thy voice as doth the unicorn !
 A sad and peaceful innocent, ap Rhys !
 I spy a tear ! Remember what I swear—
 Thou shalt not need a ladder.

BARNABAS.

I would lend
 A long one for this purpose, if I had one.

KING.

What purpose ? For what use ? and to what end ?

BARNABAS.

The bastard's use, and to his mother's end

KING.

Hold thou thy peace, and call this ferryman.
 Shout lustily, thou devil deaf and dumb !
 Bawl till thou burst thyself, dost hear ?

BARNABAS.

He comes,

And we may spare our pains.

KING.

By holy Herod !
 He shall dance nine-score cubits high this day :
 And thou shalt be his piper underneath,
 Thine ears nailed straightways to the gallows foot.

(*Ferryman brings the boat.*)

Lead in the horses ; crocodile, go first. (*Barnabas steps into the boat.*)

And lend the boy thy staff awhile. Stop ! stop !
 Hold by the rein, thou sheep-tick, tenderly.
 Now—get behind him, innocent—take time—
 Use thy staff wisely, fool ! The other follows—
 Behold, I told thee so !

PRINCE.

Go, stand aside—

And let his highness pass thee ! Get thee gone :
 Why dost thou push the boat from shore ?

MAHEL.

There be
 Two horses and four riders ; tarry awhile—
 How shall we mount ?

PRINCE.

Whither wouldst go ?

MAHEL.

To Brecon.

PRINCE.

For what wouldst go?

MAHEL.

To see his highness fight—

See the king fight.

KING.

Wouldst see me fight, boy?—fie!

The king did see thee run away, just now.

MAHEL.

That scald-pate in the boat shall be a herald,

And I will be a bard. Let us both go

To see what we shall witness and record.

KING.

So far a-foot? Ye scarce would reach in time

To see the smoke, child.

MAHEL.

Therefore we will ride,

The scald-pate with the prince upon his crupper—

And I before the king.

KING.

Dost think we travel,

Like sheriffs, with their hangmen, to the gallows?

BARNABAS.

Nay, by my father's head, whose'er it was—

We two will ride together. Let the king

Mount first, and take his minister behind him.

PRINCE.

Bring the boat nearer, ferryman.

BARNABAS.

The fish

Shall sup upon his carcase if he do.

Address thee to thy prayers—art fit to die?

FERRYMAN.

The saints forbid I should be so!

KING.

Stand wide!

Out of the way, fool! bray him on the skull!

Smite him, prince Jestin, with thy leading staff.

MAHEL.

I smite again.

PRINCE.

Ah ! what ! before the king ?
Down on thy knee for mercy !

KING.

This is death !
It is rebellion, which is witchcraft, prince !
Draw thou thy sword, and bring his head before me.

(The Prince fights with his sword, Mahel with his staff.)

Slay him, prince Jestin ! Cleave him to the chine !
Make carrion for the foxes of him ! fie !
Down with him, prince !

BARNABAS, *from the boat.*

Another such as that !
Right 'twixt the black bull's horns ! Now, innocent !

KING.

By this right hand, the prince goes back ! What ! ah !
Chased by a beggar's flea !—hold up thine head !
Stand to him ! smite him ! split him to the fork !
Fie, fie ! then will I do it. *(King draws, and both attack Mahel.)*

BARNABAS.

Now for bastards !
By this right hand a marvellous spectacle !
Two princes armed against a naked fool !
Let majesty lay on with all its might !
But keep in front, both ! Would the Bards were here !
Fair play, most potent princes !

FERRYMAN.

Jump ashore,
And help thy fellow.

BARNABAS.

That was well delivered !
The bull has had the mallet 'twixt his horns !
Now, rap the lions till they roar—lay on !
They reel, the beasts grow giddy ! Bravely craven !
A marvellous spectacle of one to two,
And wood to iron, and cowardice to valour !

FERRYMAN.

It is the king himself ! It is his grace !
Look, here is treason ! Call thy wolf-dog off !—
Let us row back and leave them !

BARNABAS.

Tarry awhile.
See, royalty grows scant of breath ! Well done !

Legitimacy staggers ! Fie, prince Jestin !
That road runs wide away from Brecon gate :
The bull is on his knees. Huzza ! for fools !
The greatest lion of seven is on his haunches.

MAHEL, (*to Ferryman.*)

Out, web-foot—jump ashore.

BARNABAS.

Take thou mine office,
As son of consolation. I the while
Will do my best in thine to cross the ferry.

MAHEL.

This water-rat has kept us half the day,
And we will keep him here the other half.
Reach me an oar ! The king must lend his horses,
And we must ride all night.

BARNABAS.

Pull bravely, boy !
Make haste across the river. Just in time !
Behold the royal standards ! Here they come !
Dost hear the trumpets ?—pull away !

MAHEL.

Make haste !
Row straight to land—then sink the ferry-boat.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Daybreak. A hovel covered by trees—under the walls of Brecon.

MAHEL and BARNABAS *fastening their horses to the rack.*

MAHEL.

The fog-encumbered valley slumbers yet :
But higher along the mountain sides, from cots
And sheep-folds, where the misty light dawns earlier,
The wolf-dog rages, and the neat-herd's call
Yells eagerly.

BARNABAS.

The upland is astir.
Through lack of spurs we almost lost the race !
A little longer had been just too late.
Daylight and Geoffrey Newmark come together.

MAHEL.

An hour will bring them both. Art resolute ?
The taches of our purpose hold they fast ?
Or have these rough roads, travelled in such haste,
Shook memory till they gape ?

BARNABAS.

If memory lodged
Next neighbour to the saddle, she had fared
No better than her tenement has done ;
But dwelling higher, she 'scapes.

MAHEL.

Then mount again :
Ride to the city gate and through the streets,
Like one whose horse's heels are chased by death.
Fill all the way with cries—awake the castle
With blasts so eager on the warder's horn
They shake his battlements.

BARNABAS.

Go to—what else ?

MAHEL.

Watch while the giddy hearers arm themselves ;

Then whisper Stephen that I need him here,
And, with him, his spare amice, belt, and cowl.
There will be running both ways—out and in—
Knights, billmen, bowmen, pilgrims, pardoners, friars—
The country round must send its fugitives;
And some, whose home is on the safer side,
Will venture forth in search of friends endangered:
So shall I pass unmarked.

BARNABAS.

Well—now to breakfast. [*Exit.*]

MAHEL.

Again at home! I scarce asked this of Heaven,
Which grants me so much more than this. I bring
An offering to the offended Spirit within;
It may be health and safety—if not these,
No shameful death at least. May God forgive
My sloth and laggard hopelessness! I seemed
A fugitive beyond the eyes of Heaven,
And thought that He too left me. O, coward in heart!
O thou of little faith, and base indeed
Beyond the imputed infamy! So soon
Apostate from his love who tries so gently!
Remember yesterday, when hope turned back,
And carried patience with her!—Millions live,
Eating in thankfulness from day to day
The bread He gives who careth for their need;
I never lacked but once. Why, yesterday—
No longer back than yesterday—I looked
On mine own shade as if it dodged to mock me,
And every step seemed one pace more from peace.
The dawn to-day beholds me here again,
A reed sore bruised, yet not unfit for use.
To-morrow, perhaps—but this is arrogance!
Best quit the thoughts of it! If shame still live,
I may not live to hear it—if it perish,
There will be some that say “We judged amiss—
He was not what we thought of him.” They wake!
Bells, horns, and trumpets—now for father Stephen! [*Exit.*]

SCENE II.

Castle Hall—Alarm Bells ringing.

The COUNTESS, *attended.* FITZWALTER. STEPHEN. BARNABAS. KNIGHTS *and* SOLDIERS.

COUNTESS.

If this be false—and I distrust thee yet—(*To Barnabas.*)
Thy last lie hangs thee.

FITZWALTER.

He brings vouchers with him :
His horse's furniture is starred with gold,
His horse a stately one.

COUNTESS.

Didst steal him, sirrah ?

BARNABAS.

I did ; and may be hanged for worse than lying :
A gibbet beckons, turn me as I please.
Seven kings are up as constables. Good father,
The saints in glory look upon thy face !
Unless my heavy sins might break the rope,
'Tis time I should confess to thee.

STEPHEN.

Out, ape !
The sheriff's deputy will shrive thee best—
I wash my hands of such.

FITZWALTER.

Yet hear him, friar !
Haply the chips of sense he scatters round
May pay for picking up. Our hands are full.—
Let Nicholas keep the bridge. Run, good Sir Giles,
Look to the river-gate and stable-postern—
Saint Vallery shall ride forth. Better be ready,
Whether we fight or no. On Tuesday last,
Both ferries were cut off, and, father west,
The mountain roads all stopped. Now, where is Jacques ?
Go, bid the armourer send my lightest helm—
Then hush those bells and trumpets.

(*Enter Ladies Margaret and Bertha.*)

Help at hand !
What place shall these fill ?

COUNTESS.

They were best in bed.

FITZWALTER.

A kiss for early risers. Frighted sleep
Has swept before his wing the rose away,
Or else their cheeks have left it on their pillows.
Do brave men's daughters tremble thus? Sir Paul,
See that the burghers crowd us not. Look out,
But keep this side the barriers.

MARGARET.

Prithee stay!

FITZWALTER.

I must, for lack of time to run away.

[*Exit.*]

COUNTESS.

Call the knave hither that has brought such news.
His answers have been hinted by our fears.
I will know more from him, or credit less.
Now, which way went he?—Oh!—come nearer, sir—
When was it that you parted from your lord?

BARNABAS.

Since yesterday.

COUNTESS.

And where?

BARNABAS.

This side the ferry

'Twixt Llandegwad and Vawr.

COUNTESS.

And why didst quit him?

BARNABAS.

He quarrelled hugely!

COUNTESS.

What about?

BARNABAS.

Our place—

The old world's question—whose should be preferred—
Precedence and priority by right—
Our own, and our progenitors. I said
That both of us were bastards, he and I
Recorded and renowned as such. So far
I granted parity—but still maintained
That his estate was farthest off from grace.
The deep foundation laid I built with proofs,
And plastered all with arguments. The kite
Flies far, and bears the quarry to her nest.
The cormorant feeds her chickens ere herself.

The bitch-wolf licks her cub. The adder draws
Her worms from forth the dunghill to the sun.
The witch that breeds with Beelzebub affords
To every imp a teat. If milk had failed,
My mother would have suckled me with blood.
On her side, therefore, stands my stool the highest.
His drove him out, and starved the vagabond !
Three days he has lacked bread. But truth is dear !
Its price was twenty buffets on mine ear.

BERTHA.

Didst leave him with such comfort ?

BARNABAS.

He had other :
There was at hand rare store of hips and haws—
Brakes hung with blackberries; and nigh to these
Most royal company.

MARGARET.

Who else was there ?

BARNABAS.

King Gryffeth, with the captain of his host,
Whose horse I borrowed. They come here afoot.

COUNTESS.

Answer me, sirrah, ere I call for whips.
Didst cross this ferry first ?

BARNABAS.

Before the king—
But with his horse—so mounted, and rode on.

COUNTESS.

Gryffeth's confederate !—Get thee to thy fellows :
We two shall talk again.

[Exit, leaving Margaret, Bertha, and Barnabas.]

MARGARET.

Thou didst forsake,
And dost belie thy master, Barnabas.
'Twere easier credit all the rest than this.
A traitor too !

BERTHA.

But why not credit this ?
The younger born is like his elder brethren.
Slight paleing parks in honor : baseness builds
An easy stile for guilt.

MARGARET.

Cruel to say it !

I cannot, and I would not, quite forget
 When he, the gentler, kissed my tears away,
 'Midst petty griefs and childish wilfulness !
 Now even the last has left him ! Mahel lack bread !
 My brother ! God forgive me !

BARNABAS.

One repents.

BERTHA.

The other has repented long ago.

BARNABAS.

Ay ?—what ?

BERTHA.

Only her better thoughts of him.
 Greatly so much, indeed—but this is all.

MARGARET.

Believe it not : her heart and tongue have quarrelled.
 Let the cheeks testify in such a difference.
 What blights and blanches them but love and pity ?
 What drowns the lamp of those proud eyes with tears ?
 Why are her lips sucked in and pressed together,
 But that she fears a sigh might pass between ?
 Trust me that Mahel's groans are well avenged.

BARNABAS.

Behold, I give thee grace and breathing time.
 Art sorry ?—Dost eschew these cruelties ?
 Be humbler, or I prophesy against thee !
 What Merlin spake shall fall !

BERTHA.

Better make haste,
 Lest otherwise what I foresee chance first,
 And ill befall which Merlin recked not of—
 That whip the Countess threatened.

BARNABAS.

Thou hast said—

*Therefore die stubbornly, and yet afraid ;
 Die young, die broken-hearted, die a maid.
 While angels guard the just, the gentle guide,
 Let Satan sit upon the lap of pride
 Barebreached, with scorn and spite on either side.
 Take back this ring : it once made one of twain—
 Such ill-joined halves are now made two again.
 Thou shalt repent and grieve ; but both in vain !*

MARGARET.

He sent it to her thus ?

BERTHA.

No matter how—

Or who the ambassador.

MARGARET.

He had none else—

So soon to quit, why didst thou follow him ?

BARNABAS.

By provocation of the lazy spirit,
To drive his manhood home again. Poor fool !
He looked for mercy in a world like this !
The ring itself was spared to charity.
“ Its rescue from disgrace will buy thee thanks—
Thou wilt be praised for bearing it,” he said :
“ I have but this with which to do thee good.”
Rather than ask such favor, let the dogs
Eat what they will of me. I would desire
A dunghill for my sepulchre, and die
Three times of kicks.

Enter FITZWALTER.

They come—Saint Vallery first,

The Lord of Builth an arrow's flight behind him !

Our fields are rank with onion-eaters' breath.

Wouldst see us fight these Welchmen, Margaret ?

Then mount the gallery stairs : yet hide thy face !

Ware bolts and quarrels ! One such eye as thine

Is well worth two such castles. Just in time !

MARGARET.

So Barnabas speaks truth ?

FITZWALTER.

To breakfast with him—

Then show his cap above the battlements :

These Welsh may think that brains are under it.

Let some one seek the Countess. Prithee, Sir Giles,

Look to the drawbridge windlass—keep it clear ;

If these our guests from Builth be not too many,

We will go forth and meet them. (*trumpet*) What is this ?*Enter SENESCHAL.*

They send a trumpet to the gate, my lord.

FITZWALTER.

How far before them ?

SENESCHAL.

He is close at hand—

Their foremost ranks are marshalled on the butts,

A double bowshot from the battlements.

FITZWALTER.

What knights can'st count among them?

SENESCHAL.

Seven or eight ;

Followed, I think, at least by threescore spears.

The rest are guessed at by the ground they fill—

Some eighteen hundred footmen, perhaps.

FITZWALTER.

Eighteen?

Live rags, for Michael Brace !

SENESCHAL.

They keep their files,

And march beneath their banners orderly.

Others are following by the tilt-yard way—

No rabble, trust me.

FITZWALTER.

Find the Countess first :

Then bring their herald hither, Seneschal.

Enter Countess.

O, here she comes ! This crazy-pated groom

We thanked so roughly for his news just now,

Has proved most wise and provident of all.

He gives an hour which scarce seems long enough.

Geoffrey is punctual, but too late. Our cousin

Is present with us here by break of day ;

But lo, the door is barred ! So now for heralds—

We shall be summoned lawfully !

Enter Seneschal with Sir Philip De Breos.

FITZWALTER.

De Breos !

Philip de Breos our guest again ! He needs

No trumpet for his welcome.

DE BREOS.

Gently pledged—

I should be welcome, since I come for peace :

Peace first if possible.

FITZWALTER.

If not—what else ?

DE BREOS.

But gentle usage till I turn my back.

FITZWALTER.

Thus much is safely yours by right, Sir Philip.
The peace you bring so swaggers in her gait—
Is plumed and harnessed in so new a fashion—
Has company so strange to her and us—
That we must needs distrust her.

DE BREOS.

For her sake

We borrow largely from our own estate,
And having all, yield half. The Earl of Brecon,
Whose father's brother died a bachelor—
Stands yet before his gates, with friends enough
To break them, if he please, or overleap.
But rather would find other friends within—
My lord Fitzwalter chief of them—henceforth
His guest and brother-in-law.

FITZWALTER.

His brother-in-law ?

My wife is not his sister.

DE BREOS.

But your sister

May be his wife : both claims be satisfied—
Cuffs change to kisses—he become the host.

FITZWALTER.

What says this sister ?

BERTHA.

Brother, what about ?

FITZWALTER.

Sir Philip's suitor and his choice.

BERTHA.

She says,

His seeking may conduct him to the stocks,
Though not his choice. He seeks an earldom too !
The greater sot this Lord of Builth may be,
The greater need his nearest friend were sober.
Alas, are both alike ?

FITZWALTER.

Ill wooing, de Breos !

DE BREOS.

Then best by proxy.

COUNTESS.

Geoffrey seeks great things
Of those who, if they would, have none to give.

Our lands and lordships here are not for barter.
My servants hold them yet!

DE BREOS.

Three Earls even still!

A jointure lord in petticoats.

FITZWALTER.

Adieu:

Go tell this bachelor outside the gates,
That if his Welshmen carry off one goose,
Or pluck one leek with which to season it,
His purse, though all too short for such a debt,
Shall make it good to me.

DE BREOS.

This will I do,
And bid him show the greater haste to woo.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

Chamber in the Castle.

MAHEL and STEPHEN.

(*Mahel rising from table.*)

Enough of both kinds. They who fast so long,
Should feed more sparingly than I have done.
The swine-herd prodigal that lived on husks,
Might die of change and surfeit. Who so swift
In squandering goods as I have been? All lost!
Yet trust me, Stephen, not through riotous living.
Old honor's spendthrift seeks his father's house.

STEPHEN.

It is his own:—his father went to meet him;
And if the music and the dance are missed,
He finds glad welcome nevertheless. My son
Brings neither dread of heart nor shameful tears:
But these to all that hate him! He shall have
The benediction which belongs to peace.

MAHEL.

I have had more instead of it:—not peace—
That never must return to me again,
Till death shall bring it with forgetfulness.
Nor have I prayed for it this side the grave.

STEPHEN.

Honor, not death, shall bring it thee.

MAHEL.

I thought

On honor once as misers think on gold :
It was my hope, mine idol.—God forgive me :
I cannot quite cast out this covetous spirit !
Why should I care for honor ? What am I—
Coward, bastard, vagabond—to think of honor !
I asked of Him for patience—and endured
To make reproach the garment next my skin,
Living in fellowship with infamy.
Scorn galled me like a hair-cloth. I have known
The shame, and who proclaimed it too—fie on thee—
Even from the lips I loved ! All else is gone
Almost beyond my wishes. What I asked,
Besides this patience which has well-nigh failed,
Were truth and justice from the just and righteous—
And I believe he grants them me.

STEPHEN.

He does !

Thou wilt not falter in a race half won,
And leave its crown behind thee ? Patience still !
He and his peace are with thee.

MAHEL.

I am patient—

A patient vagabond, or what they will—
Coward, bastard, runaway—and yet repent not.
If Geoffrey met me on the mountain top,
And mocked me there, I would again turn from him.
With fifty miles between, by day and night,
I heard the cry from throats as loud as his—
“ Out with the cuckoo from another’s nest !
Coward, bastard, hollow-heart—ah ! fie upon thee ! ”
From children idling at their mother’s door,
In every lane, I heard it. Like Cain’s curse
It crossed the mountains after me. My brain
Was grown so hot and giddy with its din,
I fancied speech and laughter everywhere—
The dumb beast mocked me :—twice I stepped aside
To strip my doublet off, and look behind it,
Whether the words were written on my back.
I have been patient—but I would not die,
And leave a felon’s name for jests and proverbs,
Rounding the drunkard’s song with ribaldry—

F

“Mothered like Mahel—base as Bernard’s son!”
 They are so hotly branded on my heart,
 That only death can cool it. Honor now?
 Who shares it with me—mother, sister, bride?
 I crave God’s mercy in the world to come—
 In this, no more than justice.

STEPHEN.

Hark! they come.

MAHEL.

Halloo! the hart is up! We must not wait
 This Barnabas all day.

STEPHEN.

Tarry! sit down!

MAHEL.

The nearest cry is ours—“*Hurrah for Brecon! (tumult heard)*
Brecon and Hereford!” This Barnabas!
 I pray thee look abroad for him.

STEPHEN.

Sit still!—

Till eyes and tongues have business of their own,
 He creeps aloof from them.

MAHEL.

I may lend help

To keep my neighbour’s gate against a thief?
 Here is no private malice? I may fight
 For Bernard Newmark’s house—Fitzwalter’s—Margaret’s?
 The bastard for his luckier brother-in-law?
 So much is lawful to me?

STEPHEN.

I myself

Would help to push the foremost ladder down,
 Being what I am.

MAHEL.

Those shouts are out of doors!

“*Builth! Lord of Builth and Brecon!*”—Bravely answered!
 Now they are at it! Prithee, Stephen, haste!
 Bring me the arms I told that laggard of—
 Thou canst not fail to find them—next the door—
 A crestless helm, and shield unheralded—
 By much too heavy for the grooms—quick! quick!
 This cry has many tongues.

STEPHEN.

It will grow yet.

Didst ever wear this harness?—is it known?—
 Has any seen it on thee?

MAHEL.

Once in sport,
But long ago, I proved its weight and fitness.
Then was I gay with gold and blazonry,
As Brecon's heir—my mother's lawful son.
This rust-gnawn suit has hung uncoveted.
Let it hold now, and ere the sun goes down,
Some that have helped to hiss me out of doors
May listen to the music that they taught—
“Coward, runaway!—fie on thee, hollow-heart!”
Now Geoffrey meets the craven face to face!
He shall not see my back again—Come in!
This squire at last.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Castle Hall. Tumult heard from without.

The Ladies MARGARET and BERTHA.

BERTHA.

The gallery casement looks beyond them now—
Not on, but over them.

MARGARET.

Their cries sound nearer.

Enter Sir Humfrey of Uske.

SIR HUMFREY.

We lose the barriers to them.

MARGARET.

Beaten back?

BERTHA.

Lost ground so soon?

SIR HUMFREY.

Keep from the lattice, ladies!

Call down the Countess—we shall need good eyes
To follow where the cross-bow shot have sped.
Some must go home, no doubt, 'twixt rib and rib.

BERTHA.

The barriers lost?

SIR HUMFREY.

We cannot hold them wisely,
So yield them freely. There our loins are bare:
We scarce count one to five.

MARGARET.

Then come within.

SIR HUMFREY.

There will be work for ladies by and by:
Have napkins ready.

MARGARET.

Why not keep inside?

BERTHA.

Counsel my brother so—why not, Sir Humfrey?
 I do abhor this shaking of the head!
 Come in, and shut the gates.

SIR HUMFREY.

My lord would laugh
 Whoe'er might counsel him :—indeed he would,
 Yea, though the wisest of our captains willed it,
 The lady Bertha stamped her little foot;
 Seeing that the vantage ground lies out of doors;
 The space being not too wide for those who keep it,
 Where twenty knights, at most, may fight in front,
 He would bide there. Meanwhile, have wine at hand:
 Such heavy work breeds thirst.

MARGARET.

Hast seen the earl?
 I pray keep near to him, Sir Humfrey Uske!
 Sir Reginald Saint Vallery has promised,
 And good Sir Giles. Trust me, I will be grateful:
 He is too hot.

BERTHA.

Nay, let him keep behind.
 Fitzwalter will not have him for a nurse.
 Three gossips are too many. Stand aloof—
 Or if he stumble, set him on his legs.
 Till then fair play, and afterwards, Sir Humfrey—

SIR HUMFREY.

I would have ten such sisters, if I might;
 And one such wife.

BERTHA.

A wife? as which of us?

SIR HUMFREY.

The bravest, surely: which is best and fairest,
 The good and fair may better judge than I.
 Whate'er betide the Earl, I cannot aid him.
 My present charge is in the barbican;
 Or else I had not tarried here so long.

(Enter Soldier.)

SOLDIER.

Saint Vallery will be lost! The lord of Builth
 Has left to some behind his picking up,
 And leaped a rood this side of him. *(Exit Sir Humfrey.)*

MARGARET.

Come back;
 Grant me one moment with thee, friend.

SOLDIER.

Not now—

My lady must not hold me!—we give way,
So mixed and tangled with the men of Builth,
That Geoffrey may come first.

MARGARET.

Where is the Earl?

SOLDIER.

Even farther from the gate, than some he fights with.
He has Sir Philip de Breos in front of him;
So will not budge one inch—but hinders us—
While he bides there, we cannot lift the bridge,
Nor loose a bolt. Builth stands 'twixt him and us:
No man may face this devil who means to live! (*Cries.*)

MARGARET.

Hark! *Builth and Brecon!*

SOLDIER.

That is Geoffrey's cry!

MARGARET.

Where is it? in the court yard?

SOLDIER.

Here he is—

They all come in together! we are beat
By over-fighting.

[*Exit.*]

MARGARET.

Where were best to hide in?

BERTHA.

I will not hide me any where.

(*Enter Barnabas.*)

BARNABAS.

I will.

Being lowly-minded anywhere may serve—
The chimney—dust-hole—or the scullery-sink.
This third-part Earl eats up the other two;
So now for peace again. The lord of Builth
May take his earldom from Beelzebub!
I have known many skilled in braining helms,
But none like him.

BERTHA.

Those shouts seem farther off.

Hast seen the Earl?

BARNABAS.

Which of them?

BERTHA.

Hereford.

Enter Countess and Seneschal.

SENESCHAL.

We can bring later news of him—he speeds
As we would pray.

COUNTESS.

Fitzwalter's wife a coward?

BARNABAS.

Ay, and his sister too.

BERTHA.

Who shouted "*Builth*!*Brecon and Builth*?"

MARGARET.

We did believe all lost.

SENESCHAL.

Faith, all was almost lost—we thought as you.
I would have bought a sheep-cot east of Wye
With two or three such earldoms. Geoffrey Builth
Had gained the bridge and second fortilege:
His cry was in the court—awhile he stood
This side the archway!

BERTHA.

Where was Hereford?

SENESCHAL.

At buffets with de Breos. We might have shut
Both factions out of doors, and turned the key,
But could not choose between them.

BERTHA.

Geoffrey Builth!

Did he give ground?

COUNTESS.

Ay, step by step he did.
He reeled, and backed away again. Canst tell
Who smote so furiously on Geoffrey's helm?
First stopped, then turned him? Whosoe'er he be,
He saved the House.

SENESCHAL.

I could not see his badge.

COUNTESS.

His place was ever foremost, or alone:
And still he cried, "*Builth—Craven—Runaway*!"

SENESCHAL.

He lied, indeed—but Heaven forgive him that.

The lord of Builth has found no match to-day
So near as he.

COUNTESS.

Send some one after him :
Seek him and bring him hither. Sir Philip de Breos !
(*Enter Fitzwalter with de Breos.*)

FITZWALTER.

This second time he comes against his will :
No wooer by deputy, nor covenant-maker.
He will give ransom measured by his worth,
So gold both handsful. I can rate him best,
Who paid for him with such a deal to do.

DE BREOS.

We lose a busy hour while others work.
The lord of Builth and Brecon brings my ransom :—
He is not far behind us.

SENESCHAL.

He came first ;
But could not keep his holding here.

FITZWALTER.

Who says it ?
Came first ?—is it true ?—was Geoffrey here indeed ?
I did hear some such rumour 'midst the din—
Who turned him out again ?

SENESCHAL.

His footing failed him.
Stunned by so loud a hammering on his ears,
He lost his breath, and staggered forth down hill,
Du Chastel after him.

FITZWALTER.

Good riddance then !
He leaves the bearer of his brains to us,
And is where he began an hour ago,
The farther side the barriers. Boy, bring wine :
The while we live together, we are friends :
I pledge Sir Philp de Breos.

COUNTESS.

Such brains as his,
With only such a hand to wait upon them,
Were short equivalents for what we lose !

FITZWALTER.

What do we lose ? how so ?

COUNTESS.

Saint Vallery.

FITZWALTER.

Good bye, Sir Reginald Saint Vallery !
I was about to say, with all my heart !
As being the better soldier perhaps, he thrust
Ten times to day 'twixt me and Geoffrey Builth.

MARGARET.

I could forgive him worse despite than that.
No matter which weighs heaviest, buy him back,
For Bertha's sake, whose knight he is.

FITZWALTER.

With what ?

MARGARET.

Sir Philip de Breos. The exchange of foes for friends
Is profit every way.

BERTHA.

Let Builth keep both.
Such potent feeders will make short the siege.

FITZWALTER.

I fain would show them both how much I love them.
Sir Philip, go back—and send me home Saint Vallery.
The largest bowl, boy—bear it with de Breos—
Shall Geoffrey say he fought the worse through thirst ?
Tell him to drive his followers farther back,
And that he may expect me.

[*Exit Sir Philip de Breos with Page.*

Now this glove—

The gage he left with us?—last night I saw it—
It was upon my helmet yesterday.
Go, find the armourer, Jaques, and look about.
Walk hither, Seneschal.

[*Exit with Seneschal. Enter Ralph, leading in Mahel whose visor is closed.*]

RALPH.

Wouldst slip the couples ?

Nay, let the ladies look upon and praise thee.
In with thee, Gog Magog, and show thyself.
Prithee, abate this bashfulness ! It tasked
My wood-craft to surprise so shy a stag !
Wouldst herd amongst thy fellows out of sight ?
Dodge and trot off again ?

COUNTESS.

He had no fellows
The last time that I saw him, Pantler Ralph ;
Nor fellow nor follower—but went straight and singly.
The only deer were we.

RALPH.

What name dost bear ?

Marry—his visor scarce may hide his blushes ;
I should not marvel were the iron red hot.
Up with it, simple one. The beaver laced ?
Thou canst not raise it ?

MARGARET.

Peace ! a trumpet—hark !
(*Trumpet.*)

COUNTESS.

Then Geoffrey sends his challenge to the gate.
I scarce may spare the leisure now for thanks—
But whom dost serve ?

MAHEL.

My lady, if she please—
A houseless frankling since my father's death,
So poor withal, I have lacked bread of late,
Yet faithful nevertheless.

COUNTESS.

I trust and take thee.
Some that began my soldiers now wear spurs.

RALPH.

Down with thee, Gideon.

MAHEL, *kneeling.*

I am all too base
For honor, lady. On a head like mine
If fallen, it could not settle. I would ask
A better-sorted boon instead of it.

COUNTESS.

What is it ?—speak quick !

MAHEL.

Fair thoughts in time to come.
Since honest service seems not always such,
Till I transgress of malice let me hold
A large forgiveness, cleansing all offence ;
That so my duty may begin anew
Both free and pure.

COUNTESS.

Well prayed ! I promise it.
Come with me, Ralph.

[*Exit.*]

MARGARET.

My mother spake the first :
I must not share these services to come :

The past are mine, as well, for recompense.
 Fain would I crave the present hour between !
 One hour which wastes its moments while I speak
 Might purchase for thee honor, which would last
 As long as life, or longer—house and lands,
 With what thou wilt to boot. Darest do again
 That which thou hast done freely once to-day ?
 Darest face this Lord of Builth a second time ?
 May Heaven forgive me, coward and thief !—I stole
 His gauntlet from the helm of Hereford—
 And now would hire the risk of cheaper blood !
 But darest thou do it freely ?

MAHEL.

I have dared

A worse thing than his face.

MARGARET.

What was it ?

MAHEL.

Shame !

All things are light and easy after that !
 Give me Builth's gage.

MARGARET.

Run to the barriers with it—

Be thou before Fitzwalter there ! Yet stay,
 If thou hast wife and children—God forgive me !
 'Bide here, and let it lie !

BERTHA.

He may forgive ;

Fitzwalter never will.

MAHEL.

Is pride as great

As mercy—which is infinite ? If so
 I dare not ask this proud man's sister aught—
 Yet would I have her prayers.

BERTHA.

I need them all—

All are by much too little for my need.
 What wouldst thou have that I may give beside ?

MAHEL.

A knight would ask what such as I must not.
 And yet it seems ill-suited where it is ;
 Ill-sized, ill-placed ; so loose, it twice has fallen—
 The ring I see.

BERTHA.

The ring?—fallen twice, didst say?
I knew not that I dropped or picked it up.
Wouldst have the ring? A knight might not have asked it:
Thou being no knight—because no knight, shalt have it.
The swine-herd has its fellow-ring—I gave
The swine-herd that, and this I give to thee.

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.

The Barriers.

GEOFFREY *Lord of BUILTH,* SIR PHILIP DE BREOS, SIR
HUGH, SIR SIMON, &c., *with* SIR REGINALD SAINT
VALLERY, PAGE, *and* SOLDIERS.

GEOFFREY.

Ay, Lord Fitzwalter and his sister too—
I win them both with Brecon. Largess, boy.

[*Gives money to the Page.*]

Take the bowl home again, Sir Reginald:
It will be readier when I call within.
Fitzwalter is our cellarist: go tell him
That we will recompense his love and service.
Hold up the head and march!

[*Exit Saint Vallery with Page.*]

DE BREOS.

Saint Vallery's helm

Sits heavy and awry.

GEOFFREY.

Droops dexterward—
The side I canted it. Ere that huge hind
Had ceased to swing his iron flail about it,
He made mine chime so emptily, I feared
The brains were out. By all the many oaths
King Gryffeth swears with when his heart is vexed,
He shall account to me.

DE BREOS.

Which shall, fair cousin?

Gryffeth does nothing, and the hind too much.
This king of six is missing. (*Trumpet sounds.*)

Here they come—

Fitzwalter's trumpet.

GEOFFREY.

Void the ground ! give room !

And mark me, sirs—the castle is our own—
As surely so as if the roast were carved,
And we at table supping in the hall.
Without Fitzwalter 'tis an empty shell ;
And he bides here. If any come between
To botch this work of mine a second time
By drawing help on either side—ye hear me ?
Sir Philip, strike him dead !

[Enter Fitzwalter, Saint Vallery, Sir Giles, &c.]

Fair cousin, a match :—

Whichever is the Earl, he will need friends ;
So let us keep our servants for to-morrow,
And work to day ourselves.

FITZWALTER.

'Tis ordered so.

Stand back, Sir Giles ; I prithee keep away.

GEOFFREY.

The longest liver is the Earl of Brecon ?

FITZWALTER.

I cannot wager with another's wealth :
My wife must be the Countess.

GEOFFREY.

So she shall,
With all my heart, if mine. I take her too.
Now for the widow ! *(They fight.)*

DE BREOS.

Off, Sir Reginald !

Keep the lists clear behind there !

SIR HUGH.

Higher ! strike higher !

Give room enough !

SIR GILES.

Then drive those muttons hence.

DE BREOS.

Fought bravely both sides, and well matched !

SIR GILES.

Stand wide !

SIR REGINALD.

Philip de Breos is nearer now than we are.

DE BREOS.

The sting that pricked him so,
Has made him mad. O mercy! hold! yet hold!
It is too late! forbear again! O cousin!

(*Geoffrey falls; his party attack Mahel.*)

Fie! this is butchery! let him go, Sir Hugh!
What! ten to one—and he past help! get from him!

*Enter Barnabas, followed by Saint Vallery, Sir Giles, Sir
Humphrey, &c.*

BARNABAS.

Help! rescue! Newmark! Brecon! bastard! craven!
Afraid to follow me, Sir Humphrey Uske?
O shame, Saint Vallery!

SIR HUMFREY.

Hold, and hear me speak!
A moment's truce, Sir Philip.

DE BREOS.

Aid me, then—
I fight for peace with both sides—stand apart!
Can any tell us what the quarrel is?

(*Mahel is rescued.*)

O shame to soldiership!

SIR HUGH.

He has his hire.
Now let him go, Sir Simon Hay. Art hurt?
What! wounded too?

DE BREOS.

Take Geoffrey's casque away.

See if he breathe.

SIR ANDREW.

The mischief is below.

SIR HUGH.

Why here are deaths enough for two or three!

DE BREOS.

Then heaven be gracious to him! Geoffrey's cry,
Erewhile so loud, is changed from "Builth and Brecon,"
To "help and mercy"—where we cannot hear it:
Who claims the Earldom now from Hereford?
Lie still, brave heart! for almost twenty years
The strongest and the noblest strove to reach thee:
Vile hands have found the way to thee at last:
This grieves me more than all the rest! Who next?
Builth falls to me, by heirship—whose is Brecon?
I look no higher than Builth. What do we fight for?

SIR ANDREW.

Let Lord Fitzwalter plead against the king:
Right rests with one of them.

DE BREOS.

Go some of you—

Our claims are narrower now by forty miles—
Instead of all the land twixt Tawe and Wye,
A grave within the chantry of Saint John—
Tell Lord Fitzwalter so. With this he quits us.
There is no more on either side.

SIR GILES.

Come all—

I will be surety for ample welcome.

DE BREOS.

There needs no pledge for such as he. Sir Hugh,
Proclaim a truce, and call the archers off. [Exeunt.

SCENE III.*Castle Hall.*

FITZWALTER, COUNTESS, MARGARET, BERTHA, SIR PAUL,
and ATTENDANTS.

MARGARET.

The bed were easier.

FITZWALTER.

I will tarry here:

Bed-time is not come yet: by then, perchance,
Our beds may change their tenants.

BERTHA.

Let me slack

The mail-plates from about thy neck.

FITZWALTER.

Be gone!

I pray the best I can against impatience.
Such wounds will do no harm to aught beside—
Skin-scars and chaps which scarce yield blood enough
For health hereafter: but with you to help,
Their smarting vexes me. I will bide here.
Sir Paul, a bachelor, is so far blessed,
His wife has never seen him down and beaten.

SIR PAUL.

She might have seen me slip.

G

FITZWALTER.

Ay many a time;
 And beaten too, as mine has done to-day.
 Thou wouldst have laid the fault upon thy legs,
 The best of all thy servants. Geoffrey Builth
 Was more to blame than mine. Slips, verily!—
 Who rescued me? (*enter Soldier*) What news, Bartholomew?
 And whence? speak quick!

SOLDIER.

The river gate, my lord—
 Sir Michael Brace is down. I come for aid:
 These cross-bow pellets rain so thick amongst us,
 We scarce may look between the battlements;
 And now du Chastel brings his ladders up.

COUNTESS.

Sir Michael Brace?

SOLDIER.

The while he turned to speak,
 A bolt sped betwixt the shoulders.

FITZWALTER.

Run, Sir Paul,
 Take every man ye meet with by the way.

SIR PAUL.

Best void the Barbican?

FITZWALTER.

Are all come in?
 Then hoist the bridge.
 (*Enter soldiers, bearing the Seneschal.*)

SENECHAL.

Lay me down here awhile

COUNTESS.

His mail is rivetted—what, help!

SENECHAL.

Drink! drink!

No matter for the mail—come nearer me—
 I would not waste the little breath I have,
 Nor carry hence a lie as toll for hell.
 Mahel is Earl of Brecon—Witness this!
 I saw the marriage—Baldwin keeps the pacts—
 A year, or more, before his birth it was.
 Give me some wine—drink! drink!

COUNTESS.

Already too much.

Ye mark, his wits are gone.

SENESCHAL.

When I upheld
Those shameful frauds they left me. Send for Ralph—
Search Baldwin for the vouchers.

FITZWALTER.

Hear him out.

SENESCHAL.

The Earl of Brecon—Mahel—witness for me. *(dies.)*

FITZWALTER.

Heaven's peace and mercy be with thee !

MARGARET.

Alas !

A fearful death !

FITZWALTER.

It matters little now,
Except for truth's sake, whose the earldom is.
If lies and fraud have lent it me a month,
They were not mine—nor shall I profit by them.
Geoffrey of Builth is here to arbitrate.

COUNTESS.

I care not—better he the Earl than Mahel.
Let might and valour take their sovereignty.
The earldom was not founded by the base,
Nor for the base.

BERTHA.

That dying man spake truth !

COUNTESS.

Ay, like a dying man he did—he dared not
The while he lived. I speak it when I please.
Truth, mistress ! Canst thou tell me what it is ?
The craven-hearted hind they called my son
Was basely born by nature. Who regards
The time he came—whether too soon or not ?
It must have been too soon, whene'er it was.
He heard his mother's honor hooted at—
His own and sister's bastardy ! He stood
A patient witness in his father's hall
The while Builth called me harlot ! He an Earl
Who did not dare to lift the gauntlet up ?
That milk-faced page, my son ? A gospeller !
If cowardice be base, he is a bastard !—
Who shame their parents must be born too soon.
Truth ! Well then, truth is henceforth on my side :
Even now thou canst discern scarce half of it.

G 2

Didst hear that thirsty stammerer talk of pacts?
Of marriage vouchers? Baldwin's testimony?
They are, and have been, ready when I pleased.
While Mahel's bones are bleaching on the hills,
And Milo's head is hidden in Hereford—
I can maintain my honor here at Brecon—
Ay, here and everywhere. (*Enter Soldier.*)

FITZWALTER.

What news dost bring?

SOLDIER.

Builth was upon his knee when I came in.

FITZWALTER.

His knee—to whom?

SOLDIER.

The same that freed my lord,
Has filled his place, since then, with better luck.

FITZWALTER.

Not man to man?

SOLDIER.

He seems the stouter one.

FITZWALTER.

Who is he?

SOLDIER.

He that cleared the gate of Builth—
So saved us once before to-day. He gives
The same both grace and breathing time.

Enter SIR GILES.

Stand back!

The Earl of Hereford is Earl of Brecon—
He has no more competitors. The last
Wants nothing this side heaven but room to lie in.
Even that is begged for him. Sir Philip de Breos,
Sir Humfrey Uske, Sir Reginald, Sir Hugh—
The best on both sides, join their hands ungloved,
And all are friends again. Here comes the conqueror.
Sore wounded, as it seems, and in a swoon:—
But twice to-day he saved us all.

*Enter Barnabas and Soldiers, bearing Mahel, followed by
Father Stephen.*

COUNTESS.

He is
Best soldier here on either side. Our knights
Are rescued by our grooms!

BARNABAS.

Off with his helm !
He shall not die so soon, whoe'er he is.
The bowl there, lady.

COUNTESS.

Stand thou back, Sir Knave.

BARNABAS.

I stood in front of those who rescued him.

SIR GILES.

He did so, truly. Let him loose the casque.

BARNABAS.

Nay, let the Countess loose it.

COUNTESS.

So I will.

'Tis honor for the noblest here. Give room—
Lift his head higher.

BARNABAS.

The water, Lady Bertha !

Have water ready when his face is bare :
Bring it, and hold it nearer to him, lady. (*Bertha brings a
vessel of water.*)

A ring upon his finger ! What bodes this ?
Is he a knight—or how ? (*The helmet is removed.*)

BERTHA.

Mahel !

COUNTESS.

My son !

BARNABAS.

Ay, lover, brother, son, but dead withal !
Cry runaway and craven in his ear :—
I did that loved him so. Wake, hollow-heart !
Out with the bastard from his father's gate !
Off, vagabond ! He will not heed or hear me !

STEPHEN.

The fugitive has fled beyond disgrace !
Loud tongues have spent their outcries ! He came back
To look upon the cruel once again,
And die at home.

BARNABAS.

Thrust out the vagabond !

THE END.

FAITH'S FRAUD.

A Tragedy in Five Acts.

CHARACTERS.

Lord of WEILENBERG and ROLANDSECK.

ALBERT, Elector Palatine, and Count of Godesberg.

RUDESTAIN, A Soldier, and Kinsman of Weilenberg.

PHILIP, Chaplain of Rolandseck.

SCREITCH, Seneschal of Rolandseck.

HUBERT, Page to Count Albert.

Baroness of WEILENBERG and ROLANDSECK.

ELLEN, Only Daughter of the Baron and Baroness.

Prioress of ROLANDSWERTH.

BARBARA and URSULA, Ladies attendant on the Baroness.

The Scenes are either in the Castle of Rolandseck, situated on a lofty rock above the Rhine, or in the Convent of Rolands-werth, built upon a large Island immediately below.

FAITH'S FRAUD.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Chamber in the Castle.

RUDESTEIN and SCREITCH.

SCREITCH.

He is unhappy, and we should forbear;
I pray be patient with him.

RUDESTEIN.

Am I not?

Though patience chafe me like a seal-skin boot,
I groan and do endure the need of it.
Lend thou thine oil to lubricate content.
Thou hast thy purse and spurs, thy chain and baton—
What dost thou lack, unless it be a wife?
My having is but blood, as old as his
Who lords it o'er his kinsman thus. A wife!
What need of that?

SCREITCH.

Who gibes me for my purse,
Should render back the gold that made its glory.
My spurs dost envy? hast thou not my horse?

RUDESTEIN.

I had thy horse.

SCREITCH.

The prodigal finds a home,
Though neither son nor servant. Thou dost eat,
Thankless, as well as chargeless.

RUDESTEIN.

Grant me patience!
We never meet, but some such canticle;

A starling might be taught it in a week :
 Repay my lendings !—give me back my horse !—
 I do abhor to hear thee.

SCREITCH.

Then disburse.

RUDESTEIN.

Ten times I offered to redeem him for thee.
 Whose injury was it that I lacked the means ?
 I prayed thee but for sixty crowns.

SCREITCH.

Thou hadst
 Six score already, and my horse was borrowed
 To go in search of payment.

RUDESTEIN.

Well, he went.

SCREITCH.

He did, long since ; nor is he yet come back.

RUDESTEIN.

Why should we fast our youth with Seneca,
 And barefoot visit learning in her schools,
 If this be all age profits ? Did he teach
 To mount thy soul's contentment on a horse ?
 I brought another in his place—go to.

SCREITCH.

Of thrice his age ; in stature, strength, and bulk,
 At most one third : goat-faced he was, dim-sighted,
 Hide-bound, and stridulous in his breath : his chine
 Had weals from end to end : being scant behind,
 His huge head found no equal balance there,
 But hung its slumbers on the horseman's arm.
 Reined up too much, he stopped ; and back too little,
 He either stumbled, or did worse.

RUDESTEIN.

In flesh

Thine did exceed, and mine as much in years.
 Is it wise to chafe at differences like these ?
 Have I no grievances, no injuries ?
 Who thrusts his knees for ever in my flank ?—
 Who whispers prophesies for base advantage—
 Extols his substance with comparisons—
 His wisdom, grace, and scholarship ?

SCREITCH.

Ay, who ?

RUDESTEIN.

Thou, seneschal ! I say it of thyself ;
Before this simple wretch—this Barbara !
Wouldst tempt her love away by craft, and shake
Thine ears at spendthrifts—rise, by humbling others !

SCREITCH.

Thou didst disparage learning in her sight,
Provoke the child to ignorant jests, and weigh
My birth with thine and hers. Ah, ah ! I have thee,
Thy back 'twixt ditch and wall ! Unlawful arms
Against unlawful, in defence, are lawful.
The jurists rule it so.

RUDESTEIN.

Her age I spake of.
The maid is young and noble—we match better.

SCREITCH.

How old dost count thyself ? I grant thee younger,
Some six or eight years younger, perhaps.

RUDESTEIN.

No more ?

SCREITCH.

Be it more or less, who cares ? Well, ten then is it ?
Say peradventure twelve.

RUDESTEIN.

The same it is,
As 'twixt our horses—no great odds in either.
Not old, yet art thou studious, seneschal,
And one so wise might awe a child like her.
I could yield much to him I loved indeed :
But friends are kind, forbearing one another ;
They lend, divide, nor seek their own again.
Is it not Tully writes so ? Friendship, truly !
Exacting crown for crown, and steed for steed !
Nay, spurning peace with just equivalents !
That niggard waywardness enthrals a spirit
Which else were eagle-winged.

SCREITCH.

Thou thinkest to please me.

RUDESTEIN.

For what ? for thwarting all I do ? Henceforth
Strive which may woo the best. Thou shalt not have her.
I please thee ?—I defy thee !

SCREITCH.

Hush! the Baron!

Speak not in haste again. (*Exit Screitch. Enter Weilenberg.*)

RUDESTAIN.

Your lordship seeks me?

Screitch told me of your lordship's haste.

WEILENBERG.

What else?

RUDESTAIN.

Of happy changes since last night—sound sleep,
And sweet refreshment. If my cousin may rest,
She will gain strength.

WEILENBERG.

She woke refreshed to-day,

And asked for Philip. Did he tell thee so?

RUDESTAIN.

He chose me for the messenger to find him.

WEILENBERG.

Well, shall we see this father?

RUDESTAIN.

If we wait.

WEILENBERG.

While others breathe with interrupted breath,
Thou ever hast some straw to stop and stoop for—
A spaniel lost last night, the boats returning,
Or cooler weather with the change of wind!—
Hast found him, man?

RUDESTAIN.

An hour, or more, ago.

WEILENBERG.

Where?

RUDESTAIN.

Penned in his confessional at church;
With ear inclining to the contrite sighs
Of guilt exhaled 'midst garlic. 'Twas the wife
Of Schwaile the ferryman who wept so much.
I would have filled his place and sent him hither.

WEILENBERG.

Our haste must wait confessions.

RUDESTAIN.

Mine could not.

He had his choice to come with me on foot,
Or carried in his cage.

WEILENBERG.

Who gave such licence?

RUDESTEIN.

Your lordship blamed my tardiness—I his.

WEILENBERG.

So—will he come, then?

RUDESTEIN.

He is come already:

Is gone—and if we tarry where we are,
He may be looked for back again. Pray, patience!

WEILENBERG.

Gone whither?

RUDESTEIN.

To the baroness, no doubt.

My younger cousin—the fairy-footed Ellen,
Found out and led him by the gallery stairs.
But first apprised us of this change last night;
Free breath and peaceful slumbers: we will hope
That health comes with, or after them.

WEILENBERG.

She may,

I would not if I could.

RUDESTEIN.

My playfellow

Basks freely in the sunshine of her faith;
And so do I in mine. Wisdom meanwhile—
If this blear-eyed and sickly slut be she—
Creeps ever on the shady side of truth;
Preferring owls to cuckoos. Providence!
I humbly crave forbearance as a fool—
But how does foresight profit us? The best
That best philosophy can teach is this—
To make the wise man such by argument,
As fools are made by instinct—easy, careless.
Our snail-horned ignorance scarce forefeels an inch:
Yet are we happier than my politic lord
Who borrows daily from to-morrow's news.
Were I as he at such a time as this,
I could find peace with little looking for.

WEILENBERG.

If nature keep her mysteries for the blind,
And can indeed purge from them grief, or dread,
Or both in one—remorse; to be her scholar,
And read, as ignorance points, the lore of fools—
Extorting peace from all repugnances—

Were worth a hundred-fold the names thou givest me,
Whether miscalled or not. Now what wouldst teach?

RUDESTEIN.

To hold the present hard, if good—to think,
If good or not, the future will be better.
The baroness slept last night—she is refreshed,
And will be well again.

WEILENBERG.

But hope is bridled:

She cannot slip the bit to range at will,
O'erleaping sense and probability.
Three times, despite of hope, I lost a son.

RUDESTEIN.

Still the chase cheers us while the game is up:
When missed, we seek some other sport. If Heaven
Have called my little cousins to himself,
All is not carried with them. Should he ask
One saintly spirit more—abides there not
Of this world's wealth sufficient for content?
Two spacious baronies, the public awe,
A name observed by kings, and such a daughter
As kings might sue for?

WEILENBERG.

What we have repays not
For what we lose, being part of what we had.

RUDESTEIN.

We should build up the breach mischance has battered,
O'ermastering casualty. The swallow ceases
Reproachful chattering on the chimney's top
Against the last night's tempest, to repair
Her broken tenement with better heed,
Or hang a new one closer to the eaves.
The bee flies fiercely round his rifled hive,
Threat'ning awhile the spoiler—then resumes
His labor 'midst the yet untasted flowers
New-blown since yesterday. Why should we men
Strive to put out the stars when night is longest,
And mount despair behind calamity?

WEILENBERG.

How point these ancient maxims?

RUDESTEIN.

Such as I—

Supposing what we fear—I would address me
To mend misfortune.

WEILENBERG.

How?

RUDESTEIN.

By raising up

Three other sons, at least, as comforters—
Providing first another baroness.
My lord has time enough.

WEILENBERG.

We have not all

These bestial privileges. Men must take
What nature portions to humanity,
Be it good or ill—and heirs of life's estate
Discharge life's debts. They feel as brutes do not :
They have affections, passions, faculties,
Oft to their own unhappiness.

RUDESTEIN.

The wise !

These are the wise, heaven help them ! Such as I—
In life's dull lane an ass—have shade and sunshine,
With mossy banks to browse upon : the spring
Feasts me with violets : when the briar-rose fades,
The thistle seems digestible enough.
So nature wears her old simplicity,
Unlaced, unfringed, unliveried.

WEILENBERG.

I used to find

Such singleness of heart betokening mischief,
Or else an empty purse. Simplicity !
Is it kin to innocence—or how ?

RUDESTEIN.

In part—

To bestial innocence it is. Yet look,
Your ass, in this, will differ from your kid.
Wayward he is, and spiteful if misused—
Inclined to sensuality—but still
A faithful servant little praised or cared for—
The better brute, at last, for being so brutish.
Spring's sunshine will awake her flowers—the wind
Again blow southerly. At present, my lord
Shoulders the blast which bites him to the bone,
And winter's frost seems endless : but I look
For happier nuptials, male posterity,
And hospitable usages. Of late
This house feels chill.

WEILENBERG.

Then seek a happier one !

Another mistress shall not mock the first.

Wouldst have me kill a second ?

RUDESTEIN.

Kill ! who kills ?

WEILENBERG.

Ay, kill, sir—One is dying—I have killed her—

And by the hardest kind of death—by sorrow !

Lived here so long, and never heard of that ?

The grooms and scullions know it.

RUDESTEIN.

What, my lord ?

WEILENBERG.

Why that her heart is breaking, man. They love

The meek and gracious—all but thou and I.

We two are kin indeed—brutes, as thou saidst.

I have not spared thy frailties—so speak out—

They would, but dare not, call me murderer.

RUDESTEIN.

Good sooth, these starts are pitiful !

WEILENBERG.

Begone !

Leave off, I say.

RUDESTEIN.

Authority may edge

The spirit too sharply for those silken bands

Which love enchains his idlers with. Ah me !

Such beings imperious should not wed the meek.

WEILENBERG.

They should not wed at all.

RUDESTEIN.

Perhaps not—for love

Suits simple natures less sublime, like mine.

We kiss and quarrel fiercely while it lasts ;

And when it ends, we are but where we were :

Heart-breaking there is none. Give me my choice,

'Twere better be the goat Silenus rides on,

Than claw Jove's thunder backed by Ganymede.

Men live on those who follow them. My lord

Will choose a husband for his child, and thus

Secure what nature grants not one in ten—

The son that pleases him.

WEILENBERG.

What son ?

RUDESTAIN.

Count Albert.

WEILENBERG.

He does not please me.

RUDESTAIN.

No !—I grieve at that !

WEILENBERG.

Why shouldst thou grieve ?

RUDESTAIN.

Because my cousin is pleased.

Methinks she shows discernment. He is not
Some ringlet-pated page, the thirteenth darling
Of some poor gentlewoman—fortune's feather
Blown from her wing when midway in the skies,
To light, at last, and navigate a sewer :
But loftier in his place than all of us—
In means, and name, and ancestry as great.
The list of princely names holds his the highest :
My lord will some time read it there.

WEILENBERG.

Till then,

Spare thou to aid his suit against my will.
Strain less a kinsman's privilege : bethink thee
That both are guests, and one, at least, unwelcome.

RUDESTAIN.

Hear me a word—bear with me ! Is it just
That here—that in my kinsman's house—not mine—
I should apportion hospitality ?
That I should judge between his guests ? dispense
My grace as his—greet one—frown off another ?
The count, a stranger, seemed to claim my service
The more because his host had graver cares
Than forest sports and table cheer.

WEILENBERG.

He did so.

I would not seem neglectful—he should not
Stay loitering here till jostled out by death.
His welcome was a forced one—this he knows—
Besought by great and zealous friends of both—
And, like our peace, reluctant. Honest it was,
At least on my part, but disclaiming love.
Why linger here at Rolandseck ?

H

RUDESTEIN.

To gain

My little cousin's gentler love instead.

WEILENBERG.

It would avail as nothing by itself.

RUDESTEIN.

Then all those friends, with all their charity,
And mighty arbitration—backed by honor,
High lineage, princely means—though both sides meet
In years and blood—

WEILENBERG.

Will his mix well with thine?

Our blood lies on the ground.

RUDESTEIN.

And let it lie!

WEILENBERG.

We may, and will, pass by it unrevenged,
But not step on, or over it. Whence come
These charities which live so far from home?
His father slew thine uncle.

RUDESTEIN.

I forgive.

WEILENBERG.

And so do I—must we adopt him too?

RUDESTEIN.

Alas, my little cousin, then!

WEILENBERG.

She proves

Her wisdom by obedience. Fancy's fever—
Which fools call love—is less with her than duty;
It does not spoil her for a nurse.

RUDESTEIN.

Why no:

At seven years old her heart could scarce beat easier,
Till this Count's courtship, and her mother's sickness
Taught it sometimes a sigh or two. With such
Grief bides not long. Her little wisdom is
So far like mine still less—bestial the one,
The other bird-like—high in air it hovers,
On dewy wing midway 'twixt this green earth
And that blue sky, as if uncertain which
Should be its resting place, whether to go on,
Or flutter down again. Here comes the father.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

A terrace running along the foundation of the Castle, high above the Rhine. Baroness Weilenberg, supported by Ellen and Ursula.

BARONESS.

Now we may spare thee, Ursula; wait within,
And bring us Barbara when we call. She is
A careless nurse, halving her task unfairly. [*Exit Ursula.*
Thou, child, canst prop me to the nearest bench.
Stay, let us rest us here awhile.

ELLEN.

Take breath—

The air is yet too sultry.

BARONESS.

Some stray breeze
Will soon be here, if any where.

ELLEN.

The boats
Have dropped their sails for want of one—look down !

BARONESS.

The depth would make me giddy, child. I feel,
Or fancy that I feel the river's freshness,
Even here so high.

ELLEN.

My mother scarce had strength
For such a journey, with so little help,
A month, or more ago.

BARONESS.

It is her last.
She will not stray so far as this again.
Fie, babe ! what, tears ! We must be resolute,
Or else be gone.

ELLEN.

That seat is still your favorite.

BARONESS.

I longed to visit it again. The sick
Feed petty wishes till grown great. Nay, some
Not sick have dainty spirits which loathe the hard
But wholesome aliment of daily life.
Here have I nursed thee, Ellen—have played with thee,

H 2

And taught the little that I knew. There needs
 No promise to return when I am gone.
 The places that we love have tongues and voices
 Which speak of those loved in them. Look—I grieve thee!
 But yet it is to warn and do thee good.
 Trouble disperses as my time grows less :
 One thought alone disturbs me.

ELLEN.

Tell it me.

BARONESS.

Beshrew my blushes—for I scarce know how !
 They have been shameful hindrances too long.

ELLEN.

A secret, is it ?

BARONESS.

Ay, child, yours—not mine.
 Both need not feel thus maidenly. This guest—
 This princely guest of ours—treads hard on sufferance.
 I would make duty easier, if I could.
 Thou and thy father do not judge alike :
 His thoughts and mine agree. We both dare trust thee :
 Yet fancy young as thine may wreath its flowers
 To crown a tyrant with them unawares.
 Such airy gallantries, with love to help,
 May task obedience heavily, not vainly.

ELLEN.

I have no judgment to contend with either :
 Nor shall I have.

BARONESS.

None else can love so much,
 Nor half so holily, as he and I.
 Stern as this Father seems, and is, indeed,
 Thou hast been sometimes blessed beyond thy knowledge,
 His pride and plaything—nay, I do thee wrong—
 A gracious mistress to both of us,
 Thy steps were on the rainbow bringing peace.
 But now a child no more, the task is harder :
 Beware reproachful tears, and looks like dread !
 They hint at tyranny. The loftier spirits
 Range not with ours : pride stirred by self-reproach
 Augments injustice : consciousness of wrong,
 Revenging what it suffers, strikes again
 The wronged, whose silence plagues it. Even in love
 'Tis easier to forgive than be forgiven.
 Because we loved, we both have been unhappy.

ELLEN.

Pray God forbear me if I sometimes lost
Such reverence for him when I saw your tears !
Nor thought how much he suffered too.

BARONESS.

He most !

The impatient fret at their own fretfulness.
In just proportion as he bruised its peace,
He grew distrustful of my love.

ELLEN.

If so,

What will become of me ?

BARONESS.

As God shall please !

It is to Him I give and leave thee, babe.

ELLEN.

My mother must be happy.

BARONESS.

I am so now.

There may be promises we know not of,
Till life has almost left us; and a time
When sickliest breathings may suffice to turn
The everlasting gate upon its hinge,
And show those mansions which we seek within.

ELLEN.

Do you believe in this ?

BARONESS.

Now, faithfully.

ELLEN.

And did not always ? But we speak too much.

BARONESS.

Then peace a moment ! Look beneath the sun.

ELLEN.

How steadily your sight endures his rays,
While mine, though strong, is dazzled !

BARONESS.

Canst discern

A tree stand singly ?

ELLEN.

With a tower beyond it ?

I never noticed either there before.

BARONESS.

Nor I but once.

ELLEN.

It has been sport to count
The towers and mountains which we see from hence :
Few ever found their number twice the same.
That which we mark is small, and far away.
My mother, are those tears again ?

BARONESS.

Mouse, mouse—

She is a child again, so bear with her !
When thou hadst yet scarce words enough for comfort,
Thy mother came to kneel where we rest now,
And pray for patience with an end like this.
She asked to see thee what thou art. The Rhine
Ran down between his purple hills as red—
There was the same light over them. The sun
Descended as I ceased : the tower and tree
Before his radiance stood as they stand now.
Why should I care for this ? Though undiscerned,
They and the mountains do not change their place !
They have been always there :—but welcome folly,
Which makes remembrance thankful !

ELLEN.

There is more—

Ask Ursula why I say so. Neither yet
Has ever seen my mother's eye so clear :
The voice is what it used to be : she woke
With smiles, and has been happy all day long.

BARONESS.

I have been—both judged rightly—now I am
Even happier still. To tell thee why I was so
I brought thee here. Joy gave me strength : there is
Enough beside this sunset. If I see
His rays no more, he leaves the best farewell.
My wealth has made me prodigal—and the tongue
Tires ere its tale begins—remind me of it.
I shall sleep well again through weariness.
Come, let us try to walk without these girls.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III. .

Chamber in the Castle.

RUDESTAIN, SCREITCH, and BARBARA.

BARBARA.

They should make haste who wait upon her hence.
My lady's thread runs fine almost to breaking :
She cannot tarry past a week.

SCREITCH.

Who says so ?

BARBARA.

I, and the doctors too.

SCREITCH.

She slept last night ?

BARBARA.

Ay, and is brisk upon her feet to day—
But may not bide. Now for the blacker sort :
Your bread-and-butter sprites are all set down.
Canst reckon me the adverse part as truly ?
Such as do love combustion, vexing peace—
Rudestein—hobgoblins, mischief-machinists,
Who twist unstable things, like me, awry ?
Or must these pass unnumbered to the priests ?
Was Pythius such ?

SCREITCH.

And Merazin, and Circe :

Some count their several nations up to nine.
Psellus makes six alone beneath the moon ;
But leaves the Manes out, and doubts the Lamiaë :
Gazæus says they swarm.

BARBARA.

Has any seen them ?

SCREITCH.

By his confession, Paracelsus oft.
Agrippa's dog had one of them. All these
Are ill to know, and worse the Succubæ.
Most water-devils bear a foul report.
Wood-nymphs are milder natured, Folliotts, Trulli,
And some think Pan—but I judge otherwise.
There needs no priest to deal with these.

BARBARA.

Who else?

Couldst thou suffice?

SCREITCH.

I might.

BARBARA.

They yield to words?

SCREITCH.

Ay, so we speak with potency, they do.

BARBARA.

What thinkest thou, Rudestein?

RUDESTEIN.

Partly like Gazæus—

That earth, at least, is one great hive of fools.

Hog's eyes I lack, and cannot view the wind—

The swarms I see I credit.

BARBARA.

Nothing more?

RUDESTEIN.

Scarcely so much at all times, simple one!

BARBARA.

Thou shalt be burnt!

RUDESTEIN.

For what?

BARBARA.

For heresy.

RUDESTEIN.

My faith is pure and steadfast, Bab, to thee.

BARBARA.

Dost not believe the privilege of thine house?

RUDESTEIN.

One half I do.

BARBARA.

Which half?

RUDESTEIN.

That we shall die.

It ever has been so at Rolandseck—

The privilege is no narrow one :—being called,

That we shall die—not called, shall cease to live.

BARBARA.

How then?

RUDESTEIN.

Ask Screitch.

SCREITCH.

All wiser men believe it.

BARBARA.

Believe they what?—that whoso dies the last
Returns for him that is to die—is it so?

RUDESTEIN.

I wave the privilege of mine house ! The last
May let me live forgotten.

SCREITCH.

So he will;

Or pretermitt. The good are visited,
And by the good—none else.

RUDESTEIN.

Why wait for guides,
Whose road runs straight enough?

SCREITCH.

They need them not :

But pass the happier to their place of rest,
Being welcomed on the threshold. Such as thou
Are outlaws from the charter of their blood ;
And grope their downward passage in the dark,
Jostled by fear.

BARBARA.

There is a prophesy ;
Three called, and one called thrice, shall be the last ?

SCREITCH.

*Three called—the last before the first is buried—
Shall leave the roofs of Rolandseck in ashes.*

RUDESTEIN.

This ends our line ! We must provide against it
Both sons and daughters, Barbara—thou and I.

SCREITCH.

Thy father died unblessed.

BARBARA.

Peace ! What be these
My lady looks so long for?—sensible sprites,
Or airy substances ?

RUDESTEIN.

How dost thou name them ?
The souls of our progenitors, or shades
That ape their likenesses ?

BARBARA.

Canst answer him ?

How teach the books ?

RUDESTEIN.

Mark, Bab !

BARBARA.

What, not know that !

RUDESTEIN.

His well of learning is drawn dry !

BARBARA.

Fie, Scritch !

SCREITCH.

Each is a Soul's Eidolon—now art answered ?

RUDESTEIN.

Ay verily ! Thou dost exceed thy teachers ;

Thyself being what thou teachest. (*Exit Rudestein.*)

BARBARA.

Get thee gone !

How near a fool he seemed, and yet escapes !

SCREITCH.

I fain would kiss thee, Bab, for speaking that.

BARBARA.

A Soul's Eidolon ! foh ! the saints forbid !

Good sooth not I—first clear thyself.

SCREITCH.

Of what ?

BARBARA.

How should a man have grown so free with marvels ?

A christian man with Succubæ and Fawns ?

I doubt this learning, if it all came straight.

There was a maid, they say, who lived near Treves,

Till married with some doctor from abroad,

Whose eldest son had horns !

SCREITCH.

And not the doctor ?

BARBARA.

These might have been inherited, past doubt :

But strange in such a child !

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE IV.

Chamber in the Castle.

COUNT ALBERT and RUDESTEIN.

RUDESTEIN.

This love should sun itself abroad. Your Grace
Has lost a salutary sight to-day.

COUNT.

What sight?

RUDESTEIN.

The Father Philip first—behind,
Two of Saint Margaret's virgins from the isle,
Veiled to the knee. He bare the altar-rod—
They looked nor right, nor left, nor straight before them;
But bowed their tearful eyes upon the ground.

COUNT.

This seems extremity, indeed—good lady!—
What dost thou know about their eyes and tears,
If veiled so closely as thou sayest?

RUDESTEIN.

Not much
Touching the eyes of one of them. She hath
A spacious foot, goes near above the ground—
Is scanty in the hams, long-flanked, and feeble:
Wall-eyed, no doubt, or one-eyed. When I spoke
She stumbled and stopped short.

COUNT.

What didst thou say?

RUDESTEIN.

“Fair Lady! gentle sister!” with obeisance.
The other stepped as lightly as a fawn—
From her, I begged a blessing—kneelt before her,
And called her “gracious mother.” Learn this, sir:
In naming women ever misapply—
Confound the epithet. Your fair one knows
That she is fair—your wise that she is wise:
But each desires the other's attribute;
And he who gives earns praise. This younger nun
Was pleased with seeming gravity: the elder
Discerned a right discerning gentleman.

COUNT.

What matters if it pleased or no, being nuns,
And one being old?

RUDESTEIN.

Good catechist, take heed,
Take special heed to please the old and homely!
The fair are easily pleased—their fairness pleases.
Opinion rules the world—both love, and hate,
And reason too, are all subordinate:
Imagination leads them all. Thinkest thou
These sisters whisper but to one another?
Wouldst have the covey?—strive to catch the hen.

COUNT.

Here comes a small and solitary chick—
One tamed without such method—by the force
Of simple fascination, was it not?

RUDESTEIN.

Mine own domestic sparrow, Barbara.

Enter Barbara.

BARBARA.

What did he say of sparrows?

COUNT.

He called thee such,
Thou bird of Venus, when her doves are chaste.
But first about these sisters from the isle—
What brings them here so high? They would not make
Mine Ellen a nun?

BARBARA.

They may make one of me.
I tire of this ill world, its Counts and cousins!

COUNT.

But wherefore, good young maiden?

BARBARA.

Because if good,
I have been better, and if young, been younger.

RUDESTEIN.

And if a maid?—go on.

COUNT.

What cousins and Counts?

BARBARA.

One is a scornful mischief-making idler
About mid-age, who whispered love most falsely:
The other, sir, is mighty—for he helps

At times to make the mightiest—count ! elector !
Prince Palatine ! what not ! his grace ! his highness !
And younger he, but worse. The first beguiled
A simple heart to folly—he has taught it
How to betray the simple.

COUNT.
Whom ?

BARBARA.

My lady :
The lamb my mistress. Both together, teach me
To drink, tell tales, and aid the impudent.

RUDESTEIN.

Hush now ! be still !

BARBARA.
What dost thou harken at ?

RUDESTEIN.

The father Philip—as I am a Christian !

BARBARA.
It will be ruin if he find me here !

RUDESTEIN.

Peace, child !

BARBARA.
I hear his sandal on the stairs :
Where shall I hide me ?

RUDESTEIN.

Lift thine apron up—
And stand before us trembling—choke thyself—
Weep, Bab ! weep bitterly !—It is his work :

(Enter Father Philip.)

We have no power to pardon thee. Hush ! peace !
Father, we need thee much, and yet must grieve thee.
Seest thou this maid ?

PHILIP.
Ay—what do maidens here ?
Your highness sent to find me ?

COUNT.

Thanks, good Philip.
I would beseech a word or two apart.

RUDESTEIN.

'Tis charitable seeking in his grace :
She how she weeps !—but let her weep !

PHILIP.

For what ?

RUDESTEIN.

The maid has erred from truth, and should repent.

PHILIP.

What ails thee, child? I heard thy mistress call thee:
What hast thou done?

RUDESTEIN.

My cousin! Did Ellen call her?
The wretch is shamed, then!

PHILIP.

How?

RUDESTEIN.

She hath untied
An ordinance of the Church to-day, and reached
Her hand in theft!

PHILIP.

Alas!—how knowest thou this?
How happens it that trespasses like these
Were found of thee so early?

RUDESTEIN.

I surprised her!
The child does not deny it.

PHILIP.

What! in theft?

RUDESTEIN.

It being a vigil, and Saint Martin's eve,
She ate of remnants which her mistress left—
The boiled white of an egg!

COUNT.

And did excuse it!
The day was not remembered—and the egg
In part was hers—her perquisite!

RUDESTEIN.

Behold

She comes to crave of us her sin's remission!
But do thou teach that theft is damnable;
And all forgetfulness augments the sin!

PHILIP.

Go, get thee gone, child. Shun these scorers, Barbara.
They practise on thine ignorance. It is not
The vigil of Saint Martin—and the egg
Was harmless, part or whole.

RUDESTEIN.

Then go thy way.

Thy mistress calls thee: look, thou art forgiven!

COUNT.

Sweet Barbara, run, and bear my services.

BARBARA.

Needs tell my lady what I did amiss?

RUDESTEIN.

Being done unwittingly, it is not needed. (*Exit Barbara.*)

PHILIP.

Fie! fie! what silly pastime is this tyranny!
O'er one so innocent too!

RUDESTEIN.

The Count in love
Is meditative, melancholy, moody,
Unsocial past companionship. Beseech thee
Give countenance to a cup of wine?

PHILIP.

I drink
No wine to-day. My counsel for his love,
Is temperance, till it leave him. There will be
No shorter remedies than sleep and patience.

RUDESTEIN.

His love will end in charity. What else
Could make thyself the gracious man thou art?
These nuns are near to lose their patroness:
Yet may they find a better comforter.

PHILIP.

Not in this world.

RUDESTEIN.

If that which good men pray—
Unchristian enmities be all forgot—
The Count may join his substance with my cousin's,
And so their means wax two-fold.

PHILIP.

They suffice.

RUDESTEIN.

He may augment their number—make more of them.

COUNT.

How are they called?

RUDESTEIN.

The nuns of Rolandswerth.
Their office is to watch before the tomb
Where Roland sleeps with all mine ancestors.
The bones of twenty generations rest

Safe in their care and sanctity. They live
As willing prisoners in the isle below.

COUNT.

How came they hither, then, to-day ?

RUDESTEIN.

Our house,
Which founded, has protected and endowed ;
Not humbly, like their customs, but as suits
Its own munificence. Yet they say no.
They thank us only for our rain and sunshine,
And claim priority, as planted first.
Love perched us here, they say, to overlook them :
For this we built our battlements so high.

COUNT.

How did he find them out ?—he blind, and they
So thickly veiled ?

RUDESTEIN.

Our Roland loved a maid—
The maid became a nun—the nun dwelt here :
And better in his eyes the roof above her,
The chimney on that roof, or from that chimney
The smoke—though watery air, and far from pure—
Than all the realms he conquered with the sword.

COUNT.

What be their vows ? They may come out, it seems ?

PHILIP.

They do to tend on sickness, visit want,
Or pray with misery.

RUDESTEIN.

Then send them hither.
His highness makes me miserable—he is
Sick of celibacy, and wants a wife.

COUNT.

Is it true they see not one another's faces ?

RUDESTEIN.

They keep no glass in which to see their own.
Who knows what eyes may hide behind those veils,
If they themselves do not !

PHILIP.

And who need care ?

RUDESTEIN.

I—as the twentieth in descent from Roland.

PHILIP.

Fie! Rudestein, fie!

RUDESTEIN.

Ay, fie! That fatherly face
May not be hid from them, if theirs from thee.
And this, at least, I do believe—

PHILIP.

Say what?

RUDESTEIN.

Why, that it is a very goodly face—
Has none of them confessed so much to thee?

PHILIP.

My lord, adieu!

RUDESTEIN.

Nay, prithee—why so brief?
The Baroness hath better health to-day:
She will not die?

PHILIP.

Dost think so?

RUDESTEIN.

Ay, I do:
And have a second hook to hitch belief on—
She is not called.

PHILIP.

Who told thee?

RUDESTEIN.

Then she is?

COUNT.

How called?

RUDESTEIN.

The good amongst us may not quit
Till sent for by the one who went before them.
The last defunct invites his follower.
I look for special heralds some day soon.

PHILIP.

Again good night, my Lord—with better health,
And wiser company! *[Exit Philip.]*

COUNT.

All he can tell
Is that my love must find its ease in patience!
No doubt but he can tell. Such watchers stand
Aloft, like windcocks o'er our battlements,
Surveying all beneath them and around them:

'They mark which way it blows! Dull wooing here,
By snatches twice a week!

RUDESTEIN.

Then quit unmarried.

Be gone in peace, a bachelor.

COUNT.

And would—

But that the dice are comforters.

RUDESTEIN.

Not mine—

I shall be soon a beggar from the deaf!

COUNT.

You take in gold the difference when you win :
And pay your losses with the hope of Ellen.
Bring purse as well as tables.

RUDESTEIN.

But your grace

Slips not the reckoning day by day—there is
A parchment history of our debts and dues—
The bond, the declaration, hand and seal.
I am a church-porch beggar, save his dish !
Two thousand crowns in debt !

COUNT.

The bride shall free thee.

The day of payment is the wedding day.
Till then, I must have tokens if I win.
My stake is gold—thine mortgages on Roland ;
Some castle with its gates of chrysolite.

RUDESTEIN.

The Baron does not love thee—and he says
His daughter shall not love thee. I endured
Rebuke to-day, meddling on thy behalf.
The father of your highness slew mine uncle !

COUNT.

Ay—so he did.

RUDESTEIN.

The Saints forgive him freely—

I do, as one of them.

COUNT.

This daughter's love

I have, and I will hold the while I may.

RUDESTEIN.

He frets against the friends who made your peace,

And me who sing your praises. He will fright
No second wife to death—but sad and single,
Live all life long in solitude. We two
Must quit his house !

COUNT.

A pestilence on his house !
At least while his. How quit it, being in love ?
Pride still grows prouder, chained by benefits
Which cannot be requited nor refused.
Would I might blow the horn before his gates,
And throw the gauntlet over them !

RUDESTEIN.

Be patient !
Mine is a hateful need, repaid by hate.
Fat Cupid buys not me with Baronies !

COUNT.

Caitiff ! dost mock my love ?—I own it was so—
But now, by all his wronged divinity—
This Vestal's fire has caught me and consumes me !
Coy she was ever toward me—yet at first
Gay, sisterly, suspicionless, and gentle.
She blushes now and shuns me—nay, her eyes
Are filled with tears—and therefore now she loves me.

RUDESTEIN.

Bah ! what care I about her tears ?—This way.
The dice are locked within, and cooler wine.
My Barbara does not blush, but bite. Now Fortune !
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

Chamber of the Baroness.

The BARONESS on a couch. ELLEN and URSULA.

BARONESS.

Take the lamp farther from me, Ursula,
And set the hour-glass in its place. It is
The good old moralist, no whit the worse
For being so old. Mark when the sand is spent :
We may not hear the clock. Our safer wisdom
Is left behind in search of something strange—
Not new, but lost awhile, and so forgot.

I 2

This lesson is of both worlds, numbering time
Rather for what it ends in, than itself.
Still stands the image graven on our tombs—
And, if we trust the sculptor, it comprises
Half of death's wealth and furniture. Who placed
These pillows where I wished them?—Barbara?

ELLEN.

Are they uneasy?—it was I.

BARONESS.

No, child—

Sickness so nursed is kin to luxury.
Then Barbara did forget them?

ELLEN.

Yes.

BARONESS.

I feared so.

You two are not forgetful. Ursula,
I shall release thee soon, so stay thou near me—
Be with me at the last—but keep her hence—
Let her not see me die.

ELLEN.

Forgive her this;

She is unhappy that you love her not.
We told her that she might be spared to-night,
So far the fault is ours.

URSULA.

I told her so.

ELLEN.

Speak in the morning kindly to her.

BARONESS.

Well—

Nay, God forbid that I should speak unkindly!
Have I seemed harsh of late?

URSULA.

Even less than ever:

Yet should I feel unhappy were I Barbara.

BARONESS.

She will be easily pacified! It is
But little sign of charity to say so—
In truth I cannot love her. There appears
No right agreement 'twixt her lips and eyes.
Sickness is superstitious.

ELLEN.

We put by
Something to be reminded of.

BARONESS.

Ay, now.

ELLEN.

When speech is easier I will ask again :
Rest till to-morrow come.

BARONESS.

It never may.

We must not wait for morrows. Watch in turns.
I make the burden heavier through my scruples—
Yet send me not this Barbara. Go, and sleep :
God grant thee peace like mine, good Ursula !

[Exit Ursula.]

I leave some signs of love for both these girls ;
But not alike, nor do thou trust alike.
Thy mother's little wisdom still grows less :
And yet she cares not—it will last while she does :
'Twere better risk ill thoughts of it, than hide
What haply might bring comfort if believed.
Sit nearer ; let me see thee while I may—
Last night I saw thy brothers, Babe.

ELLEN.

In dreams?

BARONESS.

Ay, dreams—sick fool!—a babbler of her dreams !
Yet such they were as well endured the waking.
Day's brightest certainties grow dim beside them !
Wouldst hear, to pity me ?

ELLEN.

I know the less,
Since tales which others told were hushed by you.
My mother did not credit this before ?

BARONESS.

At least she did not teach it thee. There is
But One to fear, yet hope for. If there hide
Aught else behind the veil which parts from death,
We must not seek it yet. What I shall tell thee
May be believed in, or may not—it bears
No sacred warrant with it—take or leave it—
It makes thy mother happier.

ELLEN.

Teach it me !

BARONESS.

What dost thou know already, Babe? Speak first.
Tell me the truth—thou hearest it every day.
It is the castle's whisper now—the text
Whence Ursula draws her homilies. When death
Is in, or near, the house, we all remember.

ELLEN.

Who dies at Rolandseck awakes the next
Who is to die?

BARONESS.

Who dies in charity.
Go on—What else hast learnt?

ELLEN.

The happiest they
To whom the vision chances more than once.

BARONESS.

More than one message, or one messenger,
Is blessed, but rare—as given in grace, not terror.
There is, beside, a prophecy—what is it?

ELLEN.

Three called, and one called thrice—shall be the last.
It ends our line.

BARONESS.

Thou hast been truly taught,
Yet pay not Ursula back with what I tell thee.

ELLEN.

You saw my brothers?

BARONESS.

Ay, methinks I did.

ELLEN.

They died too young for visions.

BARONESS.

Who knows that?
They died too young to tell us of them, child.
Didst hear the priory clock strike twelve last night?
I did, who slept.

ELLEN.

It struck, and loudly too—
The casements were unclosed.

BARONESS.

Didst ever count
So many, and so truly, in thy sleep?
These were not dreams—Bring me some water, babe.
At last this speaking wearies me. Sit near—

Look to the hour-glass ere the sand run out ;
Let us both pray at midnight.

ELLEN.

It is gone !

Midnight is passed already ! while we spoke
The sand is spent :—Asleep ! so suddenly—
I did not mark the clock—How still she lies !
The bosom rises with the breath, or else
These slumbers would affright me ! O my mother !
Patience so meek as thine and charity
Are surer guidance to the hope beyond
Than aught in dreams. This weariness overcomes me—
I will not sleep—but pray for both—not sleep—

(She leans upon the couch above her mother and sleeps. A distant clock slowly strikes twelve. The chamber becomes lighter—then soft music, as if in the air, and voices.)

*The heart of grief is breaking—come to rest !
Look back no more, since leaving what thou hast,
Is not forsaking.*

*Come, then, twice-called ! the meek are blessed
With calmer sleep when this is past—
With happier waking.*

*The veil is fallen—Faith's innocent fraud confessed—
All which life loves and loses lives at last—
The heart is breaking !*

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

*Hall of the Castle.*COUNT ALBERT *and* RUDESTEIN.

COUNT.

The lamps are burning ; 'tis not midnight yet.

RUDESTEIN.

Whether or no, we are the last awake.

COUNT.

Thy chamber is too sultry, thou too choleric :
Walk here awhile and cool.

RUDESTEIN.

I care not where.

With larger room the devil may ease our elbows.
We packed too close before.

COUNT.

His hap was hardest :

It scarce could be his choice.

RUDESTEIN.

This is not skill,

Nor luck, nor drink !

COUNT.

May he account for it ?

RUDESTEIN.

He hath his partialities, no doubt ;
Nor fails to help his favorites—still the preference
Were gross between your highness and myself.
A hundred crowns !

COUNT.

'Twere better ponder first
The time to pay these debts, than how we made them.
Nor I nor he can rightly guess at that.

RUDESTEIN.

I do abhor all mysteries !

COUNT.

Nevertheless

This payment is a great one.—So then ignorance
Has marred thy better fortune?

RUDESTEIN.

I did not gain
My learning from the conjuror, great or small;
Nor how to shift the dice. A hundred crowns
Escape me every night!

COUNT.

Canst tell me whither?

Not one of them has passed this way—the first
Should come to me.

RUDESTEIN.

Two thousand crowns in debt!
What needs this everlasting prate of payment?
Hast not mine obligation for so much?
Let that suffice.

COUNT.

'Tis lean sufficiency;
And yet, I fear it must.

RUDESTEIN.

Vouchers, what not!
Indentures clerkly penned! on front and back
Both seal and signature!

COUNT.

Wouldst spare thy wax?
Then bring the crowns instead. I should be pleased
With liquidation better than the bonds.

RUDESTEIN.

Dost doubt mine honor, Count?

COUNT.

No whit beyond
Thy means and will—they all are much alike.

RUDESTEIN.

Speak out! no mysteries!—ay or no, at once?

COUNT.

I do not doubt if thou be drunk or sober.
But first this honor singly:—let us say
Some creditor should seem incredulous—
How then?

RUDESTEIN.

He might receive of neither kind—
Nor gold nor pledge—and yet not lack his payment.

COUNT.

Why thou preposterous puttoc ! what dost blink at ?
 Canst not distinguish me from Screitch ?—thine honor !
 With left hand gently tapped against its hilt—
 That ancient household scowl, and eye askance,
 Grinning like Roland in the needlework !
 Hast lost both wits and money ?—nay, not money—
 Not gold, but obligations !

RUDESTEIN.

Ay.

COUNT.

Wouldst hear

How is it that I win them ?

RUDESTEIN.

Prithee say.

The secret had been better worth my care
 A month ago ; but still—this sleight—how is it ?
 How dost thou change the balls ?

COUNT.

Dost doubt *my* honor ?

'Twere better make this devil thy better friend,
 Or spare to tell me so.

RUDESTEIN.

He has his choice.

I fear no mysteries ! plucked and trussed by one,
 Then roasted by the other !

COUNT.

We should find

The bird at last but little worth our pains :
 A sort of bastard hawk—half owl, half cuckoo.
 Get hence to roost ! I will not lose my time
 Preparing scarecrows for some garden's gallows.
 Go, sleep this bravery off !

RUDESTEIN.

Were the dice honest ?

First tell me what was promised me.

COUNT.

To-morrow :

Let us not quarrel here. Thou wilt sleep sounder
 Without a bloody napkin at thy flank.
 What mountebank has missed his fool—that risks
 More than he ever had, in hopes to win
 More than he ever will have—so is angry ?
 Bah ! get to bed.

RUDESTEIN.

Give me this secret first.

COUNT.

Lose all thou hast, the reckoning is but short :
Thy two alternate suits, one on, one off—
A borrowed horse at pawn—a serving man,
Paid, fed, and liveried at the Baron's charge—
Three bows, some shafts, an ill-spliced fishing-rod—
And that hereditary sword to tap at !
Thus armed against misfortune, why shouldst fear her ?

RUDESTEIN.

I fear no fortune, Count, but trust elsewhere !
The sword is mine at least—wouldst see it naked ? (*Draws.*)
No shifts, no mysteries—daylight suits me best,
But pull its fellow from thy side—out with it !
Try which is pointed sharpest.

COUNT.

Thou wouldst swear
The devil was on my part again—seeing double—
Two swords for one.

RUDESTEIN.

I care not if I do,
Unless the second were the abler soldier.

COUNT.

Wait till to-morrow come.

RUDESTEIN.

I thought so ! wait !
To-morrow's reservations may discern
'Twixt Counts and gentlemen. I would at once
Discharge these bonds, and set my vouchers free :
But no—'twere better wait, and fight to-morrow !
Come, try a fairer game, and look about thee !

COUNT.

My luck is quite as good as this—at least
It used to be.

(*They fight. Rudestein is disarmed as Weilenberg and Servants enter.*)

WEILENBERG.

Rudestein, stand off—get back !—
What drunken brawls are these ?—begone I say !
Give me his sword, Count Albert.

COUNT.

Willingly.
It is a drunkard's brawl—but I, being sober,

Have striven to keep the peace. His sword was out,
And mine, preventing mischief, took it from him.

RUDESTEIN.

Lend it an hour to-morrow ?

COUNT.

Ay, a month.

RUDESTEIN.

His father slew mine uncle !

WEILENBERG.

What of that ?

COUNT.

Who told thee so ?

RUDESTEIN.

It was my kinsman here.

Our blood lies on the ground—but what of that ?
Why, faith, not much—nor less to him than me.
I had forgotten it—he remembers better.
But what of that ? It is a mystery !
We will make plain to-morrow what it is.

WEILENBERG.

The clearance must begin with me.

RUDESTEIN.

With both—
The devil to boot ! Let me stand steadily—
Daylight and eyesight ! What care I for uncles ?
'Twas he reminded me.

WEILENBERG.

Get hence to bed !

Take him away.

RUDESTEIN.

Our blood lies on the ground !
But what of that ? (*Servants force Rudestein out.*)

WEILENBERG.

Such pastimes, Count, are perilous,
And ill adjusted to the hour.

COUNT.

They are so :
But he, not I, preferred them—nor had either
Much space for choice.

WEILENBERG.

This is, in part, my fault—
And yet I scarce know it how is. Forgive

If nearer cares have spoilt us here as hosts.
Your highness sees our strait.

COUNT.

I do, and blush
To find my present haste my best excuse
That, needing one so long, the time is lost
In which to choose a better.

WEILENBERG.

Let us wait
Till happier hours shall make my shame the less,
For grace so ill requited and deserved—
When grief and dread have left us all.

COUNT.

To-night?

Will the gates let me out?

WEILENBERG.

To-morrow they will.

COUNT.

Forgetful as I was, and wished to be,
There scarce required so hot a summoner
As this contentious kinsman with his sword.

WEILENBERG.

By him I sent no summons.

COUNT.

Then he was
Precipitate as studious how to please;
Gleaning the sheaf of sense from straws dispersed;
Made apt by hints—Something he said just now
Of blood between our houses.

WEILENBERG.

Well—what then?

COUNT.

Ay, truly; what of that?—words dropped by chance—
No matter what! Being drunk, the babbler spilt
This new suggestion of his uncle's death.
He let good counsel leak.

WEILENBERG.

He did not drink
With me to-day, nor will I halve his quarrel.

COUNT.

You watched its issue near at hand, my lord:
You and your servants might have interposed
A step too late, had I been a loser in it.
But what of that?

WEILENBERG.

You credit what you speak ?
Or is it said in haste, Count ?

COUNT.

I believe

That such close watchers watched expectingly.
What did they hide for else ?

WEILENBERG.

I have been rash :
Shame on mine age, I may be so again.
But now my blood is cool enough. You have
No present power to quicken it.

COUNT.

He lied—

This kinsman lied, then ? If he did, it was
Before your face. He spoke of blood between us :
The morning's lesson was not taught for mirth.
Who chid his ill remembrance ?

WEILENBERG.

I did, sir.

He is my kinsman—often to my hurt :
Most men have one, at least, for whom they blush.
He talked to-day in honour of your grace—
Would make us kin—supposed alliances.
I spurned at trash like this ; but not that peace
Resumes its trust.

COUNT.

As shame is young and bashful,
It should have blushed to hide amongst these knaves,
And harken how a drunkard's task might speed.

WEILENBERG.

Count, for myself, at all times else but this,
I shall not lack an answer when I need one.

COUNT.

Take time to find a better—this is naught.

WEILENBERG.

My servants love their mistress, nor would break
The sleep which wakes, at most, but once again.
Their silence was not taught them : what they feared,
Was what they harkened for. Nor they nor I
Expected brawls to-night.—Who waits ? bring lights :
Ulrick ; tread softly ! bear them with his highness. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Chamber.

SCREITCH and BARBARA.

BARBARA.

Who stepped between the quarrellers first?

SCREITCH.

Not I.

It is a foolish thing to mix with quarrels—
Wait ever till they end. The time for peace
Is after strife, when men will honour reason.
But while the swords are out, the ears are heedless;
I never meddle then.

BARBARA.

Methinks thou art

Less apt for war than council, Screitch—being agèd.

SCREITCH.

Believe me, no.

BARBARA.

Indeed?

SCREITCH.

I thought to fight

A great deal once.

BARBARA.

Didst think of fighting much,
Or much of fighting? He who thinks so greatly
Before he fights, may fight at last but little.
Whom didst thou quarrel with, and what about?

SCREITCH.

With Rudestein, and about thyself.

BARBARA.

Alas!

But wherefore didst not fight him, then?

SCREITCH.

Because

I thought that strife might yield thee no great praise—
And me still less. It argues pride—pride, folly.

BARBARA.

Well—this is wise!

SCREITCH.

The wise leave well alone.

BARBARA.

Perfect on both sides, bearing and forbearing !
I would not have thee fight.

SCREITCH.

Lest he should slay me ?

BARBARA.

Fie ! any fools may fight with swords who wear them.
But why should wisdom cast her harness off,
Weapons of proof and ancient mastery—
Or bare the reverend crown to blows ?

SCREITCH.

So far
This Rudestein's brains are safe enough, beyond
The chance of lessening. Why does Barbara yield
Her company to the sot ?

BARBARA.

Didst not conspire so ?
To bridle lips which else might bruit abroad
The love I bear thee ?

SCREITCH.

Dost thou love me, Bab ?

BARBARA.

Not I.

SCREITCH.

Ah, ah !

BARBARA.

Well, was it not agreed ?

SCREITCH.

It was—but look, thy mistress leaves at last.
In this I make my comfort. Bab, henceforth,
Lives free to love and wedlock.

BARBARA.

I lose my mistress !

SCREITCH.

Thou shalt gain patience by mine aid : we two
Will read what Rusmundanus lately left us,
Myself interpreting the tongue.

BARBARA.

On patience ?

'Twere better after marriage, when we need it.
Teach Rudestein patience, too, for charity:
He will lose all.

SCREITCH.

I yield the crowns he hath—
And horse; but lend no more.

BARBARA.

He may not ask;
Else were it good to grant them him.

SCREITCH.

Why so?

BARBARA.

To prove whose state is happiest, wealthiest, wisest,
Thine own, or his. To justify my choice.

SCREITCH.

The debt grows great, as love and reverence lessen.
At first, his suit was urged with modesty.
Himself he likened, then, to Philip's son—
Me to the Stagyrte.

BARBARA.

He owns thee wiser.

SCREITCH.

I mean to prove his judgment right in this,
And lend no more.

BARBARA.

Thus is advantage maimed !
So must I suffer both ways !

SCREITCH.

How?

BARBARA.

There be

Dues pertinent to wedlock—Hymen's offerings—
Rings, ear-rings, bracelets, buckles, stomachers,
With chains of gold, and mantles made of fur.
All these do suitors tender on their knees,
And we, the sought, receive in gentleness.
Thou, pressed by graver cares, art slack and slow ;
Rudestein, meanwhile, is poor withal. Through him
Who hunts thy venison for thee, toil is spared.
Do thou provide fit instruments for the chase,
And send him duly furnished—else I look
Direct to thee.

SCREITCH.

Well, do so. I will bring thee
Gifts far beyond the worth of purest gold—
Wisdom, good sooth, which is a crown of glory,
And meekness for a chain about thy neck ;

K

Chaste thoughts shall be thy stomacher, and love
Thy mantle lined with fur! Come, kiss me, Barbara. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

Anti-room to the Chamber of the Baroness.

ELLEN and URSULA.

URSULA.

Barbara is stirring; so is Screitch—but he
Is swift beyond my speed: his wisdom soars
Past hope of following.

ELLEN.

Were they swords we heard?

URSULA.

Have they disturbed my lady?

ELLEN.

No—not much:

She stirred, but sleeps again. I pray thee, Ursula,
Whence came those cries?

URSULA.

A drunken battle fought
By two main friends when sober.

ELLEN.

Drunk to-night?

URSULA.

Ay, Rudestein every night: Count Albert's brains
Are not so thin as his by half.

ELLEN.

The Count?

URSULA.

Trust me thus far—that face of thine has lost
More blood than both the combatants. Cheer up!
'Twas pale enough before. Alas, poor bird!
I fright thee, flutterer! These have done no harm.
Speak now, what ails thee?

ELLEN.

Was my father there?

URSULA.

He was, they say; but all are now dispersed.
My lady stirred, but did not wake? Such sleep,
A month ago, had saved her!

ELLEN.

Quarrel to-night!

URSULA.

Behold their reverence for the house of death!

ELLEN.

My mother's face is darker than it was?

URSULA.

It is the lamp which changes. Let me watch.

ELLEN.

I cannot sleep again.

URSULA.

Hast slept at all?

ELLEN.

Till these tongues woke me—like a careless nurse,
I slept and dreamed.

URSULA.

What didst thou dream about?

ELLEN.

Of what my mother told me—of my brothers.
Hast ever thought on death as near thee, Ursula?
I never did till now.

URSULA.

He is not near thee.

ELLEN.

But should we fear believing that he is?

URSULA.

A footstep!—hark, child!

(Enter Weilenberg.)

WEILENBERG.

Does thy mistress sleep?

URSULA.

She has slept well till now, my lord.

ELLEN.

Look in. [*Exit Ursula.*]

WEILENBERG.

I woke her, then?

ELLEN.

She stirred awhile ago.

WEILENBERG.

Is she in bed?

ELLEN.

She will not rest in bed.

K 2

The couch is easier, and it may be moved.
Such changes give her ease.

URSULA *re-enters*.

She is awake,

And asks to see your lordship. [*Exit Weilenberg.*]

ELLEN.

He looks faint.

Would God my mother's peace might reach to him!

URSULA.

Men want humility, so suffer more.

The pride which wars with nature may prevail;
But she, though conquered, will not lack revenge.
His daughter hath a share of it.

ELLEN.

Of pride?—

The saints forbid!

URSULA.

Some tears would do her good.

Would she not rather that their hindrance choked her,
Than spend them on this Count?

ELLEN.

Ay, would she, Ursula.

If every drop retained were fire, she would.
Tears for a mother dying—and for him!
Cruel to mock me now!

(*Enter Barbara.*)

URSULA.

Barbara, awake!

BARBARA.

Tears!—is my lady dead?

URSULA.

Tread carefully.

BARBARA.

There is no rest to-night: I must not sleep:
This Count pursues me round the house with prayers.
I dare not go to bed, lest he should follow!
He kneels before me—highness as he is!

URSULA.

Is he not soberer yet?

BARBARA.

Who?

URSULA.

What dost seek?

BARBARA.

Count Albert soberer?—has he been otherwise?

URSULA.

Prithee, begone—what is the Count to us?

BARBARA.

My lord is angry, and, I hear, unjust.

ELLEN.

Go somewhere else! I shall think worse of both.

BARBARA.

He fears so—this it is which makes him mad!
The strife was not his seeking—so he says—
He swears it—yet my lord will chase him forth.

URSULA.

Bethink thee who may hear thee!

BARBARA.

Who?

URSULA.

My lord.

BARBARA.

He is not here?

URSULA.

He is.

BARBARA.

Then mercy, Ursula!

This crazy Count will follow me, if we stay!

URSULA.

He will not dare! He must be crazed, indeed!

ELLEN.

You fright me, Barbara! He will not come here?

BARBARA.

His summons was to quit at break of day;
And he will see you first—if nowhere else,
Why here he will.

URSULA.

He dares not!

BARBARA.

Heaven forbid

That while their tempers are so fell and spiteful,
My lord may find him here. What here!—good saints,
We shall have swords again!

ELLEN.

Barbara, where is he?

Make haste to find him!—Ursula, come with me. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.

*Chamber of the Baroness.*BARON WEILENBERG, *and* BARONESS, *on a Couch.*

BARONESS.

Her cheeks have lost their freshness: I could wish
This watching, night by night, were well at end;
But now to thrust her back would fret impatience—
I must not do it now.

WEILENBERG.

Keep her beside thee.

She will be easier so, happier hereafter.
Let us not both abhor ourselves.

BARONESS.

Let neither

Think otherwise than peacefully of one
Who is at peace.

WEILENBERG.

At last—but it was late!

BARONESS.

Let me die thankfully: I will believe
That both have ever loved me.

WEILENBERG.

There have been

These twenty years for me to tell thee so—
It were but mockery now!

BARONESS.

Peace, Weilenberg!

WEILENBERG.

I do not ask it. Peace returns no more—
While here, at least, may God forbid it should!

BARONESS.

I wished a parting easier to us both.

WEILENBERG.

Forgive me, then—I know thou wilt—thou hast
Daily these twenty years! Had love been less,
I should have made thee so much less unhappy.
Once more forgive me!

BARONESS.

Never for an hour

Did I retain the privilege to forgive.

WEILENBERG.

Yet say so.

BARONESS.

Ay, with all my heart I say it.
What else was prayed for has been granted me ;
And much I dared not ask. But trust this child !
Thou hast no power to make her love thee less ;
Trust her, for my sake, and believe her love.
Our other children call their mother hence.
This innocent girl is wiser than she seems,
And will re place us all. Now promise me !

WEILENBERG.

To promise that were one more injury.
How should I trust her love who doubted thine ?

BARONESS.

It is the last thing asked of thee !

WEILENBERG.

I promise !

BARONESS.

God grant his peace to both ! Now send me Ursula,
And leave me till to-morrow. I would sleep.

SCENE V.*Night.—Castle Hall.*

COUNT ALBERT, ELLEN, URSULA, and BARBARA.

COUNT.

This goodness brings me health again : I see
That all are not unjust.

ELLEN.

Your highness sought me ?

COUNT.

Ay, so I did—but not these witnesses.

URSULA.

We have our cares elsewhere, and must go hence.

COUNT.

Ay, do so, mistress Ursula—fare thee well !

ELLEN.

She stays as long as I do.

COUNT.

Hear me, Ellen !

ELLEN.

Then speak—we may not tarry here.

COUNT.

Nor I.

Has Barbara told you that I must be gone ?
 Because I would not yield my throat to murder,
 But lightly took a drunkard's sword away,
 Must part at dawn from Rolandseck ?

ELLEN.

The need

Hardly foreruns another stronger still.
 My father's wishes are mine too.

COUNT.

Then needs it

That you and he should think alike in this ?

ELLEN.

It is becoming that we should.

COUNT.

That both

Refuse to hear me—prove alike unjust ?

ELLEN.

He is not so.

COUNT.

Nay, if in all things else,

Why not in this ?

ELLEN.

Who tells me that he is ?

COUNT.

This change to frowns is needless, at the least.
 He drives me hence, and asks me why I tarried—
 But justly you cannot.

URSULA.

We shall be missed !

COUNT.

Promise me justice—all may ask for that.

ELLEN.

I will not doubt the honor of your highness—
 If I shall pledge me farther than is asked,
 Promise in turn to leave without offence.

COUNT.

I do.

ELLEN.

To part from Rolandseck ?

COUNT.

Twice promised.

ELLEN.

I will think justly, if I may—I must
Think kindly of your grace. That which was earned
In happier hours, shall be my care to cherish.
My peace requires so much : is this enough ?

COUNT.

Enough to make me happier ! You shall guide me.
I will be patient, grateful,—what you please.

ELLEN.

Then point not misery sharper than it is.
Do I lack patience less ?

COUNT.

You have my pledge.

We shall be happier when we meet hereafter.
Let these two stand as witnesses.

ELLEN.

Of what ?

COUNT.

My vows and yours—of faith and love between us.
Give me that hand.

ELLEN.

I never will, Count Albert.

It is not said in anger, nor in haste.
There is a mightier witness hears me too.
I never will ! We part without reproach ;
But, by his truth, one roof—with my consent—
Shall never shelter both of us again.

[Exeunt Ellen, Ursula, and Barbara.]

COUNT.

Only a moment ! Bless this little fool !
She has made me a great one. Fade, ye willows !
Now for a brook and garland !

[Exit.]

SCENE VI.

Chamber in the Castle.

RUDESTEIN and BARBARA.

RUDESTEIN.

I will not see him till we meet elsewhere :
Now prithee go and say so.

BARBARA.

To the rash,
Wine is less perilous in its fumes at night,
Than in its fogs to-morrow, child. It is
The morning's fermentation that o'erthrows thee—
What Screitch calls crapula: hence desperate pride,
Crazed pertinacity in wrong—or worse,
Headlong repentance that exasperates sin,
But never tarries long enough to mend.

RUDESTEIN.

We are not married yet, so peace!

BARBARA.

'Tis well!

Do thou and Screitch resign præoccupance—
This Count shall have my heart.

RUDESTEIN.

I yield my share.

BARBARA.

He soars above hate's archery and its cries,
On wings proportioned to the weight they carry.
Such grief as love's disasters, loss of friends,
Or hoped alliance set aside—at most
Flash some brief sparkles from his eyes, compress
His lips a little closer, tinge his paleness,
And shape his smiles the sharper. Sour or sorry
He never seems, and least when most perplexed.

RUDESTEIN.

What ring dost rub and breathe upon?

BARBARA.

It is

A gift, and not from Screitch.

RUDESTEIN.

Who gave it—he?

BARBARA.

Dost see the little lamp a-blaze within?
Look! look!—Nay, hand and all—let those sick eyes
Draw lustre from it.

RUDESTEIN.

Babbler, was it his?

BARBARA.

Brawler, wilt fight with me? Let go, I say,
And hear its history. It was the Count's:
Ellen's it should have been, but fell to me.
He gave it with a kiss. See how he mourns,
Man's moods, and mortal mutabilities!
Thou first didst quarrel with thy friend—and next,
The Baron with his son-in-law—and last,
The gentle Ellen bade her love farewell!
After the clock had stricken twelve last night,
Thy crowns, his baronies, her favour, vanished:
At one, his heart and brains were cool as ever;
He kissed, and gave me this.

RUDESTEIN.

What said he since?

BARBARA.

Just now?

RUDESTEIN.

Ay, half an hour ago.

BARBARA.

He said

He would come hither straight.

RUDESTEIN.

For what?

BARBARA.

Ask him.

He bade me nurse thee, boil a posset for thee,
Give thee a single flask of weakest wine,
Put thee in temper, make thee wise and social,
Then say that he will fight with thee no more.
Lo! here he is—so peace. *[Exit Barbara.]*

(Enter Count.)

RUDESTEIN.

There scarce is time,
Count Albert, for regrets. Last night, believe me,
I was half drunk.

COUNT.

Believe me, thou wast quite.
Why, I was half, nor did we drink alike.

RUDESTEIN.

Your highness was not ruined too—at least
We differ in this.

COUNT.

Faith, but I was ! ask Barbara :
 As surely so as she is, by your doings !
 Past help, or hope, like her ! Canst tell me why—
 Unless we needs must quarrel yet again—
 These losses should afflict thee thus ?

RUDESTEIN.

I have
 At present for their payment but the promise
 That sometime I will pay.

COUNT.

This is the growl
 Of thunder in the sunshine, long and low,
 So far away. Now that the storm is passed,
 Behold the rainbow ! Let us talk awhile
 Wisely, as we were used to do. This *sometime*,
 Which shall eat up all promises at last,
 As Saturn ate his babes, though stones in hardness,
 How near dost think it is ? Since yesterday
 My rights are mine by luck, and law, and battle—
 Two thousand crowns are trebly due to me.
 Canst give a tithe in earnest of the whole ?
 Canst find two score ?

RUDESTEIN.

I may hereafter, perhaps.

COUNT.

Ay, doubtless—or a dukedom ! look about !
Perhaps does, indeed, brings strangest things to pass !
 The imperial crown itself is findable—
 All possibilities we grant. Such men
 As thou have been made popes. Bestir thyself !
 Awake ! who knows ?

RUDESTEIN.

What would your highness have ?

COUNT.

Thine aid, thy brains, thy fellowship, and Ellen.
 And thou shalt have these vouchers back again ;
 Two thousand crowns to boot.

RUDESTEIN.

My life is yours !

COUNT.

When will these yeasty wits have purged themselves ?
 I must not wait thine head-ache.

RUDESTEIN.

It is gone.

Haply this quarrel may be turned to use :
We thrive but ill as friends. Before last night,
My footing here was slippery at the best :
Yet can I help no longer than I keep it.
We may be better credited apart.

COUNT.

Alas, a day too late ! I must be gone.
It is a day too late ! (*bell tolls.*) What bell is that ?

RUDESTEIN.

Hark ! from the chapel ! 'tis the passing bell—
My cousin's farewell to a graceless world !

COUNT.

There is another farther off—dost hear it ?

RUDESTEIN.

These nuns have waked their loudest. Every knee,
Within a league, is bent but yours and mine.
If prayers and sighs may waft a soul to bliss,
Hers will not lack a gale.

COUNT.

Lend thine aid too—

She was no kin to me.

RUDESTEIN.

She might have been,

But would not wait.

COUNT.

Had death come yesterday,
He might have turned me out, and saved offence—
Saved us our last night's buffet—spared my sighs—
Left me the baron's debtor and his daughter's—
Who must not find me here.

RUDESTEIN.

These bells still tolling,
He scarce would feel a tug upon his beard.

COUNT.

I hope to find a time for giving that
When he shall feel.

RUDESTEIN.

Our little Countess pouts ?
What did she say last night ?

COUNT.

She has her cares—

She will think justly, kindly.

RUDESTEIN.

Good ! all good !

COUNT.

I thought so too, and gave my promise bravely :
Therefore she wishes me a long adieu—
Thenceforth she has renounced me !

RUDESTEIN.

Was it thus ?

COUNT.

Bear witness that it was, her own saint Ursula,
And thy saint Barbara ! It was gravely thus !
Majestically thus !

RUDESTEIN.

My pretty cousin !

Last leaf above the rotten root of Roland !
Our crabstock keeps its savour still !

COUNT.

The puppet !

A bright-eyed laughter-loving simpleton,
With rosier cheeks than Hebe's six weeks back !
Now would she change their hue for Cynthia's paleness
While he, who slept at Latmos, woke at last
To wonder that the stars were almost gone,
And feebly lighted by her waning moon.

RUDESTEIN.

The ill-digested wine has made me sad—
Or else, belike, this chapel-bell afflicts me !
Pains plague the Sacristan ! The stomach's qualms,
And qualms of conscience are so near alike,
I scarce know which is which. It rings the passing
Of one who, though in thought she loved me little,
Was little less, in deed, my friend for that—
Quenching hot wrath, and covering frailties.
Beside, she lent some crowns without a bond.
She kept no vouchers, Count.

COUNT.

Till late last night

My dreams were ever bestial !

RUDESTEIN.

What about ?

COUNT.

Of flowery pastures, with this milk-white lamb,

In which to graze at large—the bride, nor less
 The barony. But love prevails at last !
 Love pure as Tancred's, when he fought too well.
 Those cheeks must blush again, those eyes must sparkle,
 And laughter light upon those lips—or else
 I rest no more.

RUDESTEIN.

We have a ready road
 To such repose, but rough withal.

COUNT.

Which way ?

Wilt follow ?

RUDESTEIN.

Will your highness follow me ?
 I should go first—it suits a soldier's step :
 The politician's were a pace too slow.
 There is no danger but in drawing back.

COUNT.

Keep honor from beneath our feet, and then
 Which way you will.

RUDESTEIN.

Who bars us after reckonings ?

COUNT.

I may do what I can—and what I wish
 I will do when I can, and how I can,
 With this brief reservation. Power content
 To rest unquestioned, smiles on me.

RUDESTEIN.

Why—so

I would be Emperor yet ere Lammas day :
 And in my realm there should be Empresses
 More numerous than the walnut trees ! Pledge that,
 And I will give thee, for a summer grange,
 This castle where we are—its parks for sport—
 Its farms for sustenance—my cousin's lordship—
 Old Roland's fortress for a hunting-lodge.
 Scritch shall be seneschal, and father Philip
 Thy guide to peace.

COUNT.

How soon ?

RUDESTEIN.

Stay while I count.

John Baptist's martyrdom comes Thursday next :
 Thou shalt sup here, then, on John Baptist's eve—

As heir, if this suffice and please thee best,
Or else as lord.

COUNT.

Wooing the good old way,
With shield and spear, Achilles-like—or how?
But what says honor?

RUDESTEIN.

Honor sees us chased
Like dogs, to-day, with scourges at their tails:
And honor will but laugh if, three days hence,
We chase the scourger. Mount, sir, and look sad!
Your highness tarries here too long.

COUNT.

I quit
Both house and wife; do thou take care of them.

RUDESTEIN.

It is a two day's charge.

COUNT.

Where shall we meet?

RUDESTEIN.

Where the brook widens at the forest side:
Look for me there at sunset. Now, adieu!

SCENE VII.

Chamber in the Castle.

BARON WEILENBERG and FATHER PHILIP.

PHILIP.

Self-tyranny in excess provokes rebellion:
The ill-conquered spirit will break off its chains,
And rage still worse! Remorse is surfeit's leech,
Easing, by pain, the hot heart's plethora.
Impatience we prohibit—not remorse;
But gladly bid God-speed where grief is humble.
For if she may do nothing by herself,
Like faith who can do nothing—yet without her,
Repentance never comes, nor that late peace
With healthful tears half-dried upon her cheek—
Whose stern apparitor must sweep the house.

WEILENBERG.

Thou seest how dark it is, but not how foul!

PHILIP.

He sees it better still who pities all—
How mixed and moody, mad and miserable,
Yet how mysterious are we too—as good
Till self-depraved, and may be good again.
Our daily nature seems unnatural
Once every day at least. He that would burn
A metropolitan city in his wrath,
To-morrow scatters crumbs before the birds.
Use thou her scales to weigh thyself—who knew
So well, yet loved so greatly.

WEILENBERG.

She forgave;
The dying lamb complains not! With its breath
No bleatings pass to shame the slaughterer!
This damns an earlier murder.

PHILIP.

What, in war?
War is not murder! Oft the strong are gentle,
And iron-handed soldiership forbears,
While palms, which might be peaceful, itch for vengeance.
All should thus look on strife—but while some love it,
The rest must learn it, and are justified.

WEILENBERG.

There is a curse called down upon myself
By cursing lighter sins in other men.
Answer as he should do whose office awes him,
Speak, servant of the persecuted—thou—
Canst thou absolve it?

PHILIP.

Lord of Weilenberg,
I need no adjurations! In His name,
I say there is forgiveness.

WEILENBERG.

What! for murderers?

PHILIP.

Why else were murderers prayed for? Whom hast slain?

WEILENBERG.

A tyrant for his tyranny, and now
The meek for being such!

PHILIP.

What tyrant was it?

WEILENBERG.

A fellow-soldier in the field when young,

L

Ill-joined by common friends and services.
One tent sufficed us, followed by one page,
A widow's child, sickly and slow, but patient:
Studious to please, he would have served alike,
But loved the harshest least. Wretch, if he erred,
It was through dread, when threats extorted tears,
And tears provoked to stripes again! He grew
Helpless through blows—was scourged for being helpless!
I found him thus, and smote the murderer.
We fought—behold the avenger! who consumed
In doing that which he, at least, did briefly—
These twenty years!

PHILIP.

The curses of our youth,
Like arrows shot toward Heaven, at last fall down,
To light upon our age! Peace be with both—
For lo, a better comforter! (*Exit Philip. Enter Ellen.*)

ELLEN.

My father!

WEILENBERG.

Dost ask me for thy mother, child?—She is
Not as we are, but happy. She rests now!

ELLEN.

I should not be unhappy, were you not.

WEILENBERG.

You did not help to make her miserable.

ELLEN.

She bade us think her happy—and I do so.

WEILENBERG.

She is escaped—at least thank God for that.
One of the two is free!—but art not fearful?

ELLEN.

Of whom?

WEILENBERG.

Of me—thou hast none else to fear.

ELLEN.

What have I done?

WEILENBERG.

Why, what she did,—endured,
And hid thy tears.

ELLEN.

You do affright me now!

WEILENBERG.

I have begun in time—through me were lost
A mother and a lover since the dawn!

ELLEN.

Let me but try to make my father happy,
And I will love none else.

WEILENBERG.

How shouldst thou love me?

ELLEN.

Pray, father, for her sake grant this! It is
The first prayer in her name!

WEILENBERG.

It was her last!

ELLEN.

Will you reject us both, then?

WEILENBERG.

Try to love me!

Remind me daily of my vows last night.
Teach me humility. I would excuse
What must seem cruel, done at such a time.
Let sorrow conquer shame, and both speak plainly—
Count Albert's heart is harder than mine own!
I never could have mingled wine with death,
And drunken brawls with misery.

ELLEN.

I did not wait

Till this was told me.

WEILENBERG.

Did not wait for what?

I cause these tears!

ELLEN.

They are the last for him.

Count Albert knows we shall not meet again.
Before my mother died, I told him so.

WEILENBERG.

It is a vow which death has witnessed, then!
Didst wish to see me less unhappy, Ellen?
I am so now.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Chamber.

BARBARA bearing a large charger of silver—and SCREITCH.

BARBARA.

She sends me back to thank thee for thy love,
But will not taste thy poly-balsamum :—
Scarce she endures its sight.

SCREITCH.

Why not ?—she must !

BARBARA.

She would for thy sake, but she cannot, eat.

SCREITCH.

Months have been spared for study on the mess ;
Books searched by candle-light to make it healthful—
But, lo, 'tis perfected a day too late !
The lips are cold for which I toiled so much !
Let her but taste it, Barbara.

BARBARA.

She abhors it.

The will is with thee, but the sense eschews.

SCREITCH.

Didst thou recount its properties ?

BARBARA.

At large ;

The just proportions might o'ertask my skill ;
But yet I named the meats. A molewarp brayed.
A coney's kidneys stewed with juniper.
The brain and fat of peacocks chased to falling.
A running capon's legs ; and swallow's oil.
But chief the goat with no white hair about him—
His gall, his tongue, his marrow.

SCREITCH.

These for strength.

BARBARA.

A hedge-pig's lights and bristles ; fennel, tansy,
With ambergris, and yeast.

SCREITCH.

To quicken life—
Its spur and sharp propulsion.

BARBARA.

Gillyflowers.

Hops plucked before the night-dews leave their clusters.
Eft's eyes, dried cray-fish shells, and blindworm's eggs;
With twelve white pebbles gathered from the brook
When Sol declines from Scorpio.

SCREITCH.

What I missed
Was moss from off a dead man's skull unburied,
But trust I found the equivalent.

BARBARA.

She thanks thee.
Such pains deserve so much, at least.—But meats
Which should have helped thy pottage heal her mother,
How shall their virtues profit her?

SCREITCH.

The branch
Is parcel of the tree, though broken from it—
The flower is nourished as its stalk. In this
I worked with Nature heedfully, and mixed
Dried thistle-beards, and pounded columbine,
Seeds from the sunflower, and a rock-dove's trail.

BARBARA.

I saw thee chase a porker round about,
And fight the ram, by moonlight, for his horns;
No cost was spared!

SCREITCH.

I grudge nor toil nor charge—
But needs must grieve that both are profitless!

BARBARA.

It grieves her more to seem unthankful toward thee.

SCREITCH.

'Tis pity next to sin we waste it thus!

BARBARA.

Set by the charger till her loathing leave her.

SCREITCH.

I may not, child! The moon will wane at eve:
Our herbs change with her from their wholesomeness.
Who eats must make good speed. Bring spoons and napkins—
We two will profit wisely by mischance.

That vessel's sides are warmed with lusty health,
And many days.

BARBARA.

To make our numbers equal,
Thou shalt eat threefold more than I.

SCREITCH.

I will.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Border of a forest, with a brook in front. The Castle seen at some distance, backed by mountains.

COUNT and RUDESTAIN, meeting.

RUDESTAIN.

So far on foot? Stand back a little, Count—
A little farther, prithee, in the shade!
That buckle on thy belt is seen a mile—
Or some such glitterer flashed the sunbeams off it,
Ere I had reached midway. The time was sunset,
But love outruns his promises.

COUNT.

Hast seen
This widowed kinsman since his loss last night?

RUDESTAIN.

Doubtless I have, with proffered services.

COUNT.

What said he?

RUDESTAIN.

Not one word.

COUNT.

A fair escape!

Grief tames the tamer.

RUDESTAIN.

As a she-wolf softens
Unmilked since yesterday, whose cub is missing.
I might have guessed the meaning of that scowl,
If Screitch had held his peace.

COUNT.

Interpret it.

RUDESTEIN.

The dead must first be buried—then farewell
To him and Rolandseck! Your highness keeps
Some kinsman sleek at home to carve the meat,
Draw off too tight a boot on hunting days,
Or see the hawks well trained and wisely tended?
The basest things serve best for common use.
When state dismounts, and lays its housings by,
A sheep-skin feels as soft. We ease your heels,
And save the cost of boot-jacks.

COUNT.

Now, the moral?

RUDESTEIN.

I will not yield to eldership. I have
No house but this. If one of us must quit,
He can provide another, I cannot.
Here dwelt mine ancestors, and I dwell here.

COUNT.

John Baptist's Martyrdom comes Thursday next!

RUDESTEIN.

No matter which is master, he or thou,
Here will I build my nest.

COUNT.

Thou shalt.

RUDESTEIN.

I will.

Our scuffle might have maimed the spirit's wings!

COUNT.

When will begin these obsequies?

RUDESTEIN.

To-morrow.

At dawn the day which follows will begin
This quittance that we wot of.

COUNT.

Not to-morrow?

RUDESTEIN.

We bear our dead no farther than the church,
And leave them near the altar. Custom asks
A ten days sepulture beside and after.
Requiems are chaunted for the soul enlarged,
Alms are dispensed, and masses multiplied.
Religion perfects all her offices
Ere shuts its mouth the pavement underneath.

COUNT.

Thy living lease at Rolandseck is less
By just nine days to one.

RUDESTEIN.

I will not quit!

Your highness is content to bide down here?
Small faith in scaling ladders, Count, and swords
Are sharp above.

COUNT.

My courage, matched with thine,
Falls short a flask and half to-day.

RUDESTEIN.

If both

Were fairly on the outside of the moat,
We should be special climbers, or remain there.
When will your highness take the equivalent,
And give me back my bonds?

COUNT.

On Thursday next.

RUDESTEIN.

Then come to-morrow night—bring company—
As many friends and servants as you please.
Let them not lose their stomachs by the way,
And I will find the feast.

COUNT.

Nay, not to-morrow.

RUDESTEIN.

Then not at all.

COUNT.

It is Death's festival—

I would not drink to Venus from the bowl
Prepared for grief by him!

RUDESTEIN.

Well, we are quits.

Behold, the effects we sealed upon are tendered—
Revenge and Rolandseck with love and Ellen!
Make ample riddance, and release the debt—
I do my part.

COUNT.

Dost grace these obsequies?

RUDESTEIN.

Not I—my duty aggravates offence—
That stare was all its thanks.

COUNT.

Will Ellen be there ?

RUDESTEIN.

Ellen will not be there ; her father will.

COUNT.

Art sure ?

RUDESTEIN.

Scritch says so, Philip, Barbara—
She will not follow—women are exempt.
What hare is this a-foot we must not hoot at
While doubt holds back the dogs?

COUNT.

We might shut up
The mourners with their dead, were all together—
Lock the church doors behind them ?

RUDESTEIN.

Bravely, Count !

'Midst all thy scruples, keep an eye to thrift !
So might we save a second ceremony—
Hold priest and people, bride and father ready !
But woe the while ! Our coupling, to be perfect,
Wants just one-half—Ellen will not be there !

COUNT.

How is this church defended ?—fourscore spears
Might hunt the ancient otter in his isle ?

RUDESTEIN.

Beside the generations sprung from Roland—
His bones and theirs—time, sanctity, remorse—
It will be garrisoned with flesh and blood
Out-numbering fourscore spearmen four to one.
Blind, deaf, maimed, crippled scarce may bide at home
In twenty miles to-morrow ! All her children
Will mourn this mother of the miserable.
They may not think to fight, indeed—but oft
Men fight the better for the want of thinking.
Nor will a part lack arms—What ! Sacrilege !
True thou art skilful, valiant, fortunate—
As fresh as Mercury, and as light of foot—
But spare to tempt this elder nevertheless :
If thou must strike at all, strike first.

COUNT.

Not I.

RUDESTEIN.

Thou shalt fight none but Ellen, then.

COUNT.

There needs

Long wings or ladders for a war with her.

RUDESTEIN.

The gates may let thee in, while Bab and I
Do stand as porters to an empty house.

COUNT.

This song seems inspiration !

RUDESTEIN.

Fie, Count, fie !

Repent the trespassing on sacred things !
Let churches be ! The child secures the sire—
And she bides there with me—a man disgraced—
A man put out of office ! reprobate !
And left behind as naught ! By twos and threes,
On foot and horseback, bring the best thou hast ;
Then tarry here till twilight.

COUNT.

Well—what next ?

How shall we hide their weapons ?

RUDESTEIN.

Yeomen's weapons !

They need not hide them ! Hundreds like themselves
Will don such gear, and come as colts new harnessed.
A woodman's crates may hide the better sort.
Only shun ostentation. Mixed or not
With humbler gazers, let them trudge this way
By twos and threes—do thou keep out of sight.
Death's march begins not till the sun goes down ;
Thou mayest discern its torches whence we stand.
Hold fast awhile—give time enough—be wary,—
Fright not the ferrymen by over haste.

COUNT.

And then ?

RUDESTEIN.

Mount to the gate, sir ! What forbids ?
My gentle cousin needs a comforter.

COUNT.

If we might gain the ferry-boats as well,
We should consummate ! Sisters, mourners, idlers—
Old Roland's isle thronged threefold, like a warren,
Must yield or starve !

RUDESTEIN.

I will provide for that.

But softly, sir—the praises of your grace—
A careless eye, an easy-gaited conscience—
Are precious gifts, no doubt—but qualified—
Good gifts, I say, indeed—but dashed with worse—
Such be that goatish honor, horned and bearded,
Which looks so grave, and stands almost on nothing—
Punctilious pride, fantastic fickleness!
Your grace may quit as lightly as you came,
And leaving me behind to pay the rent,
Ride forth elsewhere.

COUNT.

At this time yesterday
The baron's wine was on my lip—last night
He and his daughter warned me out of doors:
Now am I free to enter how I can.

RUDESTEIN.

Thou wouldst get back again, and I would tarry.
My choice is 'twixt provision with the birds,
Or fire-side drinking and two thousand crowns.

COUNT.

Two thousand in the purse, and one paid yearly.

RUDESTEIN.

Good night, then, to your highness.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

Chamber in the Castle.

ELLEN, PRIORESS, URSULA, and FATHER PHILIP.

PHILIP.

The Prioress and myself are so far trusted
As not to break, or change, but perfect order.
We regulate the ancient rites of death—
This were in custom's teeth.

PRIORESS.

What, veiled as we!

Wouldst follow like a masker to the grave?
Is this the time's sobriety! Disguised
To walk with us?

PHILIP.

We cannot grant this prayer.
Better bethink thee, child, or ask my lord.

URSULA.

He marked, to-day, how pale she looks, and then
Thanked heaven that no such duty rests with her.

ELLEN.

Either he would refuse me what I prayed,
Or yielding, grieve the more. I will not ask.

PHILIP.

Five such processions to the place of rest
I can myself remember—Screitch counts more—
The females of the house were never with us.

PRIORESS.

Daughter, have patience ; let it be forgot.

PHILIP.

All prayers, if faithful, meet above—and thine
Will rise as swift from hence.

ELLEN.

Must usage rule

Both life and death ?

PHILIP.

Ay, wherefore should she not ?
When might she cast her decent mantle o'er us
If not to hide our tears ?

ELLEN.

You will be just.

I know not how to strive with both so wise,
And I so ignorant. Have I seemed hard to govern ?

PHILIP.

As little lawless as a lamb at play ;
Harder to catch than hold. The more I marvel
That three of us conjoined may scarce prevail
Where each did singly.

URSULA.

Ellen, be advised—

In this the mother will direct thee best.

ELLEN.

My mother has directed !—if I live,
I will be there.

PRIORESS.

Thou shouldst have told us so.

Nay, God forbid our scruples ! what she willed
Is sacred now.

URSULA.

When did my lady say so ?

ELLEN.

Last night.

PRIORESS.

The night before ?

ELLEN.

It was last night.

PRIORESS.

Daughter, you dream ! The saint had passed to rest.

ELLEN.

I did dream then—have patience with me both !
Scarce three days back I was incredulous too.
My little wisdom seemed enough for that.
Last night I slept, but thought that she awoke me :
Upon my cheek I felt the breath of life.
“ Child, thou must haste to follow me,” she said—
Then raised, and led me out. The court was full ;
Thou, father, 'midst the choristers, wast there.
Behind the bier, I followed next but one,
She first, with eyes which often turned upon me.
The prioress and a sister either side me—
All three were veiled, and habited alike—
Like theirs, my feet were bare. I wondered not,
Although the coffin and the corpse were present,
That she, as if in life, walked on before us.
While many thronged us, for the crowd was great,
My cousin Rudestein plucked the veil aside,
And I awoke. Now, shall I tell my father ?

PRIORESS.

Thou hast a better guidance from above,
Than his or ours. Happy indeed, if so !
If she who rests appoint such raiment for thee,
It must be thine till death.

ELLEN.

Lend it to-night.

PRIORESS.

Not for disguise—in aid of artifice !
'Twere profanation of a sacred thing,
And might hereafter arm reproach against us.
This dream of death foreshadows death to sin ;

The grave of pomp ; the peace which walks with us.
Brother, what sayest ?

PHILIP.

There shall be no pledge given
Constraining conscience for the time to come.
If this our benefactress willed it thus,
Why should we doubt ? The earth contains no place
More sacred to us than a mother's grave.
Thither she goes to weep, and thence returns
Unnoticed by the gazers of the world.
Enjoined or not, it is an innocent purpose :
Nor does that veil conceal a meeker brow,
Or purer bosom.

PRIORESS.

We may trust thee, Ursula ?
Thou wilt not whisper in licentious ears
Of what we do ?

URSULA.

I am no whisperer, mother.

PRIORESS.

Nor now, nor in the time to come ?

URSULA.

I promise.

PRIORESS.

Till we release thee, Ursula ? Take thou this,
And hold it to thy lips. (*Gives the Cross.*)

URSULA.

I swear ! what else ?

PHILIP.

Tell it not Barbara, then. I would impute
No worse than mirth too free, and wildly-scattered—
Ill chosen times—companions ill assorted.
Shew kindness, lady, but not trust.

URSULA.

'Tis easy

To shut her out from partnership in grief—
She seeks not mourners. Ellen, we have heard
Counsel like this before.

PRIORESS.

The time needs haste—
We must provide fit garments for thee, child.
Look, this has grieved thee, brother ! Come with me. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.

*Chamber.*RUDESTEIN *and* BARBARA.

BARBARA.

Screitch sits in judgment on a suit thrice pleaded ;
Nor will he leave before the court is up.

RUDESTEIN.

What suit?

BARBARA.

On three stray pullets claimed by Guelddt,
Which Schqueel defends. Our seneschal to-day
Is powerful with his precedents, and cites
The Pandects to the sow-ringer.

RUDESTEIN.

In Latin ?

BARBARA.

Nay, they who profit by them know the best :
The parties seem content.

RUDESTEIN.

Do both ?

BARBARA.

All three.

Wouldst smooth or sharpen when he comes ? We have
Scarce time to night for jealousy.

RUDESTEIN.

What else ?

BARBARA.

Call home thy wits and answer me at once.
I hate this butting head to head with questions !
Art sick of soberness so soon ? Art grieved
To miss the time of day for getting drunk ?
Art frightened at thy policy ? Art sure
This second master may exceed the first ?
That he will trust us better, feed us better,
Or how ?—What dost thou muse about ?

RUDESTEIN.

Bab ! Bab !

I have outrun temptation.

BARBARA.

Dost repent ?

I partly know its shape—'twas bandy-legged.
One kind, at least, was swift enough to catch thee.

RUDESTEIN.

But that escaped was worst.

BARBARA.

Than treachery ?

RUDESTEIN.

If treachery, who will profit by it ?

BARBARA.

He.

RUDESTEIN.

Why, thou—

BARBARA.

What—what ?

RUDESTEIN.

His pocket pouncet-box—

His brimstone comfit-case.

BARBARA.

Awake at last.

RUDESTEIN.

I do feel sick about this change of lords,
Whilst thou canst chirp so cheerily.

BARBARA.

More need.

RUDESTEIN.

Barbara is hard of heart !

BARBARA.

Who made me so ?

Wilt let me tell thee what I think thou seemest ?

RUDESTEIN.

Ay—what ?

BARBARA.

A fish.

RUDESTEIN.

What sort of fish ?

BARBARA.

The kind

Which loses heart when dry—is out of breath—

Almost a coward if he cannot drink.

RUDESTEIN.

I hate these masters old and new—I love
Good cheer and Rolandseck.

BARBARA.

And Barbara?

RUDESTEIN.

This Count will hold his promises, at first;
And I shall hold his crowns. He hath snake's eyes—
A cockatrice's eyes replete with malice!
The while we talked, last night, about this treason,
He kept his right arm free and farthest off.

BARBARA.

This helped thee to outrun the fiend, belike?

RUDESTEIN.

I would have risked it, Bah, if sure of grace:
Safe in my pardon here, I would have tried it!
The bonds were in his pocket.

BARBARA.

Be content!

RUDESTEIN.

I would have done it, and avowed it too.
It must have seemed fair play. Our peace was known
To none beside thyself—our hate and challenge
To all the house. This would have shown a purpose—
A meeting predisposed by both of us.
It is but waterish wisdom to provide
A nursery for his grace at Rolandseck!

BARBARA.

Being next of kin thyself?

RUDESTEIN.

The next to Ellen.

Their son, though younger, disinherits ours.
Yet must this Count come in, to keep us here;
And we must eat.

BARBARA.

Our road is perilous!

RUDESTEIN.

Nay, wherefore is it perilous, child? These lords
Shall buffet with each other—he who breaks
His neighbour's neck, saves mine.

BARBARA.

Now peace! 'tis Screitch—

M

Do thou speak loud, and look the other way.

RUDESTAIN.

His learning is enough without a wife—
They ever spoil each other. He is old.

BARBARA.

I care not—he is wise and peaceable.

RUDESTAIN.

Dost hate me, Barbara?

BARBARA.

Perhaps I love him best.

Hush ! hush ! the Seneschal—Is judgment ended ?

SCREITCH.

As thine is ended, simple one, it is.

BARBARA.

And how is that?

SCREITCH.

Discreetly, Barbara.

Dost love the wisest best ?

BARBARA.

Not I.

SCREITCH.

Hush ! hush !

BARBARA.

Or if I do, which is he ?—Hast adjudged
These fowls, and how ?

SCREITCH.

I gave a bird to each—

Each bears his costs.

BARBARA.

But there were three of them !

SCREITCH.

Our civil statute turns not right nor left—
But harrows irrespectively and widely :
Our cannon ploughs too deep—

BARBARA.

What was thy sentence ?

SCREITCH.

One bird he takes who lost the three—it is
Retrieval of his right when right availed not.
He one who stole the three—his recompense
For restitution of the two surrendered.
The third remains with us.

RUDESTEIN.

Why so ? She stands
On level footing with the rest ?

SCREITCH.

Being sole,
She stopped the way to peace.

RUDESTEIN.

We have at hand
A harder case.

SCREITCH.

Propound it simply then.

RUDESTEIN.

Suppose two claimants, and a single pullet ?

SCREITCH.

The owner takes her.

RUDESTEIN.

He must be declared.
Stand forth between us, Barbara—dost behold ?
While all dwell here, she may be neutral, common—
To neither pertinent, or both—but soon
I shall go hence.

SCREITCH.

She tarries, if she will.

RUDESTEIN.

The choice is hers, then—if she will, she goes ?

SCREITCH.

So she choose wisely for her good, it is :
Else choice is impotent, must be revised,
Falls back to equity.

BARBARA.

I will not choose—
At best, a husband is an awful thing !
But this seems past belief !

SCREITCH.

What marvellest at ?

BARBARA.

Why, that while all beside are blind with tears—
All standing still aghast, or running mad—
Guests wondering, kinsmen whispering, servants sobbing—
That he, in whom resides the castle's peace,
Should muse on love and pullets !

RUDESTEIN.

I am naught !

M 2

I must sit still !

BARBARA.

My lord is lost in sorrow !
How should he rule at such a time as this ?
Grief-poisoned—care-confounded ?

RUDESTEIN.

Screitch sustains
The burden of his state and government—
Fills his high place, the prop of Rolandseck !

BARBARA.

The strongest might call out for help, to-night.

RUDESTEIN.

What hour dost think it is ?

BARBARA.

The next to sunset.

RUDESTEIN.

Is it so late ?

BARBARA.

Hast viewed the soldiers' scarfs ?

RUDESTEIN.

Are all their bucklers cleansed and newly burnished !

BARBARA.

Hast loosed the castle ensign from its staff ?

RUDESTEIN.

Who leads the household, now that I may not ?

BARBARA.

What guests ?

RUDESTEIN.

How many lances ?

BARBARA.

Who rides first ?

RUDESTEIN.

Better place all the trumpets by themselves :
The men at arms show statelier undivided.

BARBARA.

Two knights support the banner, do they not ?

RUDESTEIN.

Dost mount the heralds next ?

SCREITCH.

I have o'erlooked
These cares too long—come with me, Barbara.

RUDESTEIN.

Why, mercy on us, man ! is this to do ?

BARBARA.

The castle warden bears the coronet ?
Six pennons of our own—how many strange ones ?

RUDESTEIN.

Six of our own with those from Weilenberg.
Take heed the horsemen jostle not the priests !

SCREITCH.

They go the first ?

RUDESTEIN.

Dost hear him, Barbara ?

A skilful marshal ! What art gaping at ?
Twelve men at arms, and then the pursuivants.
How should my cousin order these things now ?
Come bustle—wouldst disgrace thyself and us ?
Good sooth, a learned Seneschal !

BARBARA.

He is

Amazed, and in a strait ! I pray thee aid us !

RUDESTEIN.

What dost thou weep for—why this passion, Barbara ?
Not I—who thanks me for mine aid ?—disgraced,
Put out from trust !

BARBARA.

Thou dost not love me, then !

RUDESTEIN.

Well—stir, and look about thee—call the squires—
Send every man that shames us not.

SCREITCH.

What !—all ?

RUDESTEIN.

Lo, this is learning ! he must thwart me still !
Wilt do the work thyself ?—then set about it !
All but the porter-grooms and prison-guard—
The more the statelier. I will place the watch.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

*Night—Castle Gates.**The PORTERS, and a Crowd with torches.*

1ST. PORTER.

Drive them from off the drawbridge—keep it clear.

2ND. PORTER.

Good people, stand aloof.

1ST. PORTER.

Nay, good or not,

They shall, or break my mace in twain. Hold now!
Pray which may you be?

1ST. CLOWN.

Faith, sir, pretty well—

Some have been better, sir, but good enough!

1ST. PORTER.

For what? Grimme, pitch him in the moat—off with him!
Being good, he shames his fellows—drown him first—
Your very well draws envy.

2ND. PORTER.

Let us halve them:

Thou drown the good, and I the other sort.

1ST. PORTER.

With all my heart—I shall have least to do—
Scarce one in twelve. So, sir, your quality?

2ND. CLOWN.

Why middling, master.

1ST. PORTER.

Stand between us here—

Knock for his brains on thy side, I on mine.

He shall declare his faction ere he swim.

These neutrals side with either that is nearest:

I hate a double face.

Enter RUDESTAIN.

RUDESTAIN.

Thou dost abjure

Thy mystery, then, and Janus.

1ST. PORTER.

We maintain—

This simple Grimme and I, sir, do continue
Our footing here, though neither out nor in;

Ill perched upon the threshold, yet we tarry !
While some there be left-handed, swivil-sighted,
Smooth-spoken, supple-witted, seven-fold gifted,
Who scarce can bide in peace, though locked and barred !

RUDESTEIN.

Dame, take those children farther back—dost hear ?

1ST. PORTER.

She should belong to me—a strange good woman !
A widow too, and poor enough for grace.

RUDESTEIN.

Why dost not keep thy babes at home ?

WIDOW.

They have none.

1ST. PORTER.

Marry, I doubt her now—she is too brief—
The best have ever much to say.

2ND. PORTER.

Poor soul,

Her tears have choked her ! Dame, be comforted !
Thy benefactress is with God.

WIDOW.

I know it.

2ND. PORTER.

He pities all, but most the fatherless.

1ST. PORTER.

The buttery dole is stopped since yesterday.

2ND. PORTER.

It will begin again.

RUDESTEIN.

Then what dost grieve for ?

1ST. PORTER.

Have patience, dame !

WIDOW.

I have.

RUDESTEIN.

We all lose friends.

WIDOW.

Hast lost thy best and last, as I have done ?
God grant thee patience too !

RUDESTEIN.

They come—stand wide !

Hark ! 'tis the anthem !

1ST. PORTER.

Take those bonnets off!
Keep the way clear there !—force them farther back !

Music heard through the gateway.

Soldiers on foot.

Heralds and trumpets on horseback.

*The banner supported, and followed by Knights mounted.
Priests, Friars, and Choristers, singing and carrying torches.
Father Philip supported, bearing the cross.*

The bier under a canopy.

Ellen habited and veiled as a Nun between two others.

Weilenberg, supported by Pages.

*Knights, Squires, Pursuivants, Servants, succeeded by Soldiers.
The Procession passes over the drawbridge and descends
toward the river, followed by the multitude.*

RUDESTEN, SCREITCH, BARBARA, and PORTERS remain.

RUDESTEN.

Why dost not follow, Seneschal ?

1ST. PORTER.

He stands

Beyond the confines of his kingdom now,
Sinking his royalty.

SCREITCH.

Hast seen this foot
Outside the drawbridge till to-night ?

RUDESTEN.

I have.

SCREITCH.

Not since my horse was borrowed.

RUDESTEN.

I have seen

No wise man look so like a satchel-carrier
Descending from his martyrdom of birch—
A pocketeer of pippins newly whipped.
Thine eyes have drowned thy manhood !

SCREITCH.

Tully wept,

And Naso, heavily—they both record it.

1ST. PORTER.

Not for a nobler lady whosoe'er.

BARBARA.

Grimme's huge red head hangs dripping all awry,
Like sun-flowers after thunder storms.

1ST. PORTER.

Bethink thee,
There fall no wardrobe legacies to us—
As mantles laced and lined with martin-skin :
No, nor yet petticoats, nor smaller matters—
Rings, chains, and clasps—bequeathments suaging sorrow.
It will require a skin of last year's brightest
To set my legs as stiffly underneath
As they were this day week.

BARBARA.

The rest find hope,
And hope finds comfort.

1ST. PORTER.

Where may these be found?

BARBARA.

Where liquor runs the fastest.

1ST. PORTER.

In the Rhine !
My hope falls flat again.

BARBARA.

The hall, thou cuckoo.
Our guests have left enough for temperance.

RUDESTEIN.

We bar excess. Ask thou the Seneschal.

SCREITCH.

There must be civil order every-where :
I will observe these feeders in the hall.
Do ye watch here.

RUDESTEIN.

Like skeletons in stone—
The bare-ribbed guardians of some monument,
Ill fed by gluttonous Death their seneschal—
Each at the archway grinning, stand apart,
And watch who comes the next.—Look, this is learning !
It makes men's hearts like mill-stones.

BARBARA.

Prithee, Screitch,
Be sociable, and let us tarry here,
While these two eat and drink awhile.

RUDESTEIN.

Begone—
Beckon your fellows ere the pasties cool ;
Let every man be wise in liberty.
We three will tarry for you here.

1ST. PORTER.

Come in.

Hoist up the drawbridge, Grimme.

RUDESTEIN.

What need of that?

There may be messengers for things neglected ;

We will not quit the gate.

1ST. PORTER.

Behold a sign !

They last not long that grow so quick in grace.

I look for his departure. Grimme, ask patience.

[Exeunt Porters.]

RUDESTEIN.

How fares thy gentle mistress, mistress Bab ?

She is unused to grief, but all must season.

Who stays behind as comforter ?

BARBARA.

Not one.

Her face is paler than her mother's was !

What should I speak ? I know not how to speak,

Nor what is wisely written to that end.

RUDESTEIN.

Who walks with sorrow, should tread tenderly.

Now, where is Ursula ?

BARBARA.

Ursula is a fool :

No matter where she is. Well, so then, Ursula !

And who, forsooth, is Ursula ? Wonderful !

Is Ursula's breeding clerkly more than mine ?

RUDESTEIN.

Bab, thou art made of charity, but still

Nature can profit little by herself.

There needs, for grief and comfort, art and study.

BARBARA.

In all this house, there is but one that sees

What counsel suits a Christian, what an owl :

That knows the kinds, and forms, and rules of grief—

Nor, trust me, is that Ursula.

RUDESTEIN.

Who then else ?

Is it the Father Philip ?

BARBARA.

Nor he, nor thou.

Philip is great with Chrysostom and Cato—
But is he here at hand?

RUDESTEIN.

This Screitch were nought :
His studies lie away from human letters ;
Nor be they deep elsewhere.

SCREITCH.

Who told thee so ?
Thou didst not sound my shallowness thyself.
Are Philip's deeper ?

RUDESTEIN.

Ay.

SCREITCH.

Bring out thy scales,
Then hang thyself, with all thou hast, beside him,
And see which kicks the beam.

RUDESTEIN.

Philip is chaste.
Go, feed thyself and bacons in the hall!

BARBARA.

He shall not go ! There may be prodigals
As fain to eat 'midst swine, with greater need.

SCREITCH.

Bravely, sweet Barbara—right upon the comb !
His jest will shake its feathers, marry will it !

BARBARA.

Thou shalt go comfort Ellen—I myself
Will see to peace and order in the hall.

(Exeunt Screitch and Barbara.)

RUDESTEIN, *alone.*

This were a merry world, were laughter mirth—
But part of it is treachery, more is scorn !
Screitch has his learnèd triumphs every day ;
While Barbara laughs at Screitch, and I at Barbara.
This baggage would be baroness !—'Tis strange
That hearts exempt from fear should beat so hard !
Is expectation stronger than remorse ?
I have, in childhood, ventured thrice as greatly—
With one hand trusting to a wallflower's toughness,
Ill-balanced o'er these battlements, hung down
To thrust the other 'twixt the corbels under—
Full three-score fathoms sheer above the Rhine—
All for a starling's egg or two :—have climbed
Some nook unthought of since the builders left it,

To sit amidst their maze of masonry,
 Screamed at by daws. 'Twas slip and perish then!
 My kinsman's tyranny was but some dislike
 To some loose practices of mine—at times
 A sharp authority in his own house—
 Therefore I turn him out of it!—This world
 Moves like a Tartar waggon drawn by mares:
 The first are right and wrong—then force and fortune.
 Who drives may change their order either way,
 And harness as he will. So now they come!—
 Count Albert first.

Enter Count, Hubert, and Soldiers.

COUNT.

Stop here, and breathe awhile!

RUDESTEIN.

In absence of the baron, welcome, Sir!

COUNT.

We gain the castle, as you gained your Barbara—
 Almost too easily. Pass on and halt.
 Eustace, secure the gates. Where be these porters?

RUDESTEIN.

With Barbara in the hall.

COUNT.

And where is Ellen?

Let us deal tenderly—she need not know
 Whose house she lives in yet.

RUDESTEIN.

Are all embarked?

The rest is ordered so, we cannot err.
 Run, Gregory, up the stream—take these behind thee—
 Thou wilt find boats prepared within a mile:
 Get in, and let the current float thee back;
 Then land upon the isle, and bring the barges,
 But cut the flats and ferry-boats adrift.

COUNT.

Collect their oars—make haste!

[Exit Gregory.]

RUDESTEIN.

And now, sir page,

Put fetters on the impatient in the hall.
 Suppose me dead, and say so—what dost wait for?
 I must be missed awhile.

HUBERT.

Your highness sends me?

I serve none else.

COUNT.

Quick ! quick, man ! hold them fast.

[*Exit Hubert.*]

RUDESTEIN.

This cock must lose his spurs—Divide the rest—
One half may man the walls.

COUNT.

Lift up the bridge !

Our numbers will be more by break of day :
The horse are left below. Bring torches hither !
Be watchful, Eustace !—Now I am at home !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE VI.

Ante-room to Ellen's Chamber.

SCREITCH and URSULA.

URSULA.

She will not hear thee, Screitch ; she lacks the patience.

SCREITCH.

Then tell her that I come to make it more.

URSULA.

Thou ever dost diminish mine.

SCREITCH.

Because

I turn my cares to Barbara, art aggrieved ?
Beware of jealousy !

URSULA.

Is Barbara meek ?

SCREITCH.

By blood and nature, no—she was as thou—
But is reclaimed by precept. (*Enter Barbara.*)

BARBARA.

Lost ! all lost !

SCREITCH.

What ails thee, Barbara ?

BARBARA.

Canst not ring the bell ?

Goat, buzzard, owl !

URSULA.

Thy scholar brings thee grace !—

Art crazed ?

BARBARA.
All lost !

URSULA.
What else beside thy wits ?
Is this a time for jests and fooleries ?
Bethink thee where we are !

BARBARA.
He was a man !
He fought an hour upon his hands and knees !
He would not live a coward !

SCREITCH.
What has chanced ?
Who is it ?

BARBARA.
Rudestein !

SCREITCH.
What of Rudestein ?

BARBARA.
Killed !

SCREITCH.
Be patient, child—no matter !

URSULA.
Who has killed him ?
BARBARA.

Count Albert !

URSULA.
Where ?

BARBARA.
Between the gate and bridge.

URSULA.
Count Albert at the gate ?—Shame on thee, Barbara !
Wouldst fright thy mistress now ?

BARBARA.
Then let her hide !
The Count is in the castle !

SCREITCH.
Who is with him ?

BARBARA.
Ten thousand thousand murderers !—Wilt believe ?

[Enter Count, Hubert, and Soldie.

BARBARA.
Screitch, what dost wear thy sword for ?

SCREITCH.

Get behind !

I too will fight an hour upon my knees—
They shall not harm thee, Barbara !

COUNT.

Take his sword.

We cannot spare the leisure, Screitch.—Be mute !
Hold thou thy tongue—thy mother's tongue—dost hear !
One word of latin hangs thee—Where is Ellen ?

URSULA.

Your highness would not fright her now ?

COUNT.

Where is she ?

URSULA.

Let her not learn these cruelties !

COUNT.

I am loath

To part a second time without adieu.—
Is Hubert here ? O, wait till I shall call.
Lady, I had no choice—she gave me none.
Dost think to pelt me back again with words ?
That ere I came, I did not count the cost ?
We scarce shall yield to Ursula's eloquence.
It is a cruel time—so use it gently.
She stands between her father and myself—
Tell her she has the power to heal unkindness—
And make all whole.

URSULA.

To-night, my lord ?

COUNT.

Ay now.

URSULA.

Your highness will have patience !

COUNT.

She is wise :

The baron's ease requires it more than mine :
For his sake, she will shorten what offends him.
Go, bear my services. Now, where is Hubert ?
Take Screitch for conduct with thee to the isle.
Say that I sent thee to the baron there,
In early quittance of his courtesies—
But shall be better pleased with gentler dealings :
He may regain his peace by healing mine.
Go with him, Seneschal !

SCREETCH.

And Barbara too?

Release me, Barbara.

CUCNY.

Lady, wilt be gone? (*to Ursula.*)Or must I spare thy toil, and go myself? (*Exit Ursula.*)

What need of Barbara? She remains with us.

Thou shalt be free to tarry or return.

SCREETCH.

Be patient, Bab!

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

*Cloisters of the Priory at Rolandswerth.
The Church, opening into them, seen lighted beyond.*

WEILENBERG, FATHER PHILIP, ELLEN *veiled*, PRIORESS,
NUNS, and ATTENDANTS *returning from the funeral.*

WEILENBERG.

Thanks, lady, for these pains: believe them such,
Not as they seem proportionless or faithless,
But honest as they are.

PRIORESS.

We have put forth
Our duties feebly measured by our will,
Yet with what strength we had.

WEILENBERG.

Again, good night!
As good as prayers or holier tears can make it.
She thanks thee too whose heart is with us here.
I pray make haste to visit her again.

PRIORESS.

We shall be with her yet before we sleep.
Such vigils will not rob us of our rest!
Brother, I promised for us both, with these (*to Philip*)
To help our prayers.

PHILIP.

Who stops us at the gate?
Move on! make way there!

PRIORESS.

Night comes earlier now:
It is not late.

PHILIP.

We draw toward ten o'clock!
I know not why we tarry thus.

N

RATH'S FRAUD.

[ACT IV.]

WEILENBERG.

A traitor too !

PHILIP.

He has sworn to God—and lo, he proves us !
His conscience still.

ELLEN.

Remember what was promised !

PRIORESS.

Peace's daughter!—come with me—do thou remember !
(She leads Ellen into the church and closes the door.)

WEILENBERG.

My child ! pray speak !—Not thou, go drive him hence—
Let him not make me mad !—My daughter, sir ? *(swoons.)*

PHILIP.

Till he can better hear thee, peace—Give help !
This passion staggers life !

HUBERT.

Stand from him, Scritch ;

Leave room for air.

PHILIP.

Bring us a seat—he wakes.

WEILENBERG.

Sirrah, where is she ?

HUBERT.

She is safe, my lord.

WEILENBERG.

Is there no help ?—Have mercy yet awhile !
Then strike, and I will bear it—not this child !
Surprised !—it could not be surprised—he bought it—
He tarried there so long to purchase treason :
Now, where is Rudestein ?

SCREITCH.

Slain before the gate :

Count Albert slew him there.

WEILENBERG.

Who sold me, then ?

SCREITCH.

Where didst thou find me, youth—and what about ?

PHILIP.

This trifler chafes me too !

HUBERT.

The gates were wide—

We found the drawbridge as the pageant left it.

WEILENBERG.

This mantle chokes me !—Whom dost gaze at thus ?
Be gone !

PHILIP.

He will, my lord.

WEILENBERG.

Take off this cloak—
Thy master could not make me thus—he lies—
Go, tell him so, and what thou wilt beside.
I have slept ill of late—he could not do it—
The heat has made me faint.

HUBERT.

I have no will
In bearing what I bring, my lord. It is
The curse of such as I to blush and serve.
'Twere better live by beggary, and be spared
The greater shame, than thus return a thief
Where welcome was so liberal !

WEILENBERG.

Pray forgive !
I wound the unoffending yet again—
And speak before a servant of his lord !
Thou art not yet a father, gentle youth,
Or I would ask no patience. What dost bring me ?
Now for this message from the Count ?—be brief !

HUBERT.

Chased out from Rolandseck, he so far makes
The balance just, he says ;—in what remains,
He shall be better pleased with kinder dealings ;
And that your Lordship may regain your peace
By first restoring his.

WEILENBERG.

Alas ! ill-broke,
And raw to baseness—what dost falter at ?

HUBERT.

I do not love my harness.

WEILENBERG.

Tell the Count—
It is *to* him, not *of* him, that I speak—
He looked for traitors where he lived a guest ;
He chose an hour to strike whom Death had stricken ;
He mocks me at the grave.—Wilt thou say this ?

HUBERT.

I will, my lord.

WEILENBERG.

There has been hate enough,
But still in honour, tell him : neither side
Has hired from fraud its cowardice till now.
Henceforth he must endure the names I send him—
Traitor, and traitor-maker, coward beside,
Unless he cast his fortune from the scale—
The difference which his fraud has made between us—
And like a soldier, meet me as I am ;
Of late grown old apace. Lend arms to-night—
The thief that stole them should be so far just—
To-morrow I will hoot him at his gate ;
Coward, traitor, traitor-maker, say.

PHILIP.

Thine heart
Is in thy mastery, though thy hands are not ;
Keep it from counsels such as these, my son !
Where is the Lady Ellen ?

HUBERT.

She is safe,

And will be honoured.

WEILENBERG.

Will she be restored ?

SCREITCH.

The Lady Ellen would not hear my counsel :
But is it thrown away ? I keep, and use it.
The crumbs rejected serve to feed ourselves ;
Let us receive them humbly. Where didst find me ?

PHILIP.

This haste may do us wrong. Give space to breathe.
She would not hear thee, sayest ? Let me go with them.
Haply I shall find access where she is.
My lord, let me go too ! We scarce can mar
What seems so ruinous, by awkward handling.
There needs a comforter ; but time let slip
Is lost, with hopes mere precious than itself.
What sayest thou, son, wilt take me there ?

HUBERT.

I will.

WEILENBERG.

If so, make haste : be with her in my place.

PHILIP.

Now which way went the Prioress? Tarry for me.
Expect me at the boat. *[Exeunt.]*

SCENE II.

The Church, lighted. A Coffin before the Altar.

ELLEN and PRIORESS—the veils of both withdrawn.

PRIORESS.

To what thou seemest and art, the words were apt—
He marked them not.

ELLEN.

Then spare to chide me thus.

PRIORESS.

Ay, so I will—but henceforth how to trust thee?
Be patient yet.

ELLEN.

I am.

PRIORESS.

Be thankful too!

Good guidance brought thee with us here.

ELLEN.

I know it,

And have confessed it on my knees. Till now
Her voice seemed near who taught me to endure.
My steps to-night were steady as your own,
The tears I shed as few. But this is hard,
That he should prove so cruel who has left us
No home to rest in coming from the grave!—
Hard to have loved the hard-hearted!

PRIORESS.

Love! what now?

For other thoughts I brought thee where we are.
We blessed the All-merciful, and so He is:
But yet his judgments follow one apace,
And must outrun them both:—they shall not prosper!

ELLEN.

My father? God forbid! what has he done?
Judgment for what?

PRIORESS.

Askest thou for what?—look there!

[Points to the coffin.]

Hast lost remembrance of thy mother's tears?
 So soon forgot? I saw them on her cheek,
 Washing the freshness off it day by day,
 Till changed to what she is:—and still I see them!
 Judgment for what?—is one of these hard-hearted?
 Which was it broke her heart, if only one?

ELLEN.

She pitied the unhappy.

PRIORESS.

So did I.

ELLEN.

His misery is the more to need forgiveness.
 My mother, look upon me! leave me not!
 There is no bosom now to hide my tears!
 O, hear me still, my mother!

PRIORESS.

Hush! she does—

This passion is of sin—I am thy mother.

ELLEN.

O, no—not thou—we never have but one!

Enter Philip.

PHILIP.

There is hope yet!

PRIORESS.

We need it.

PHILIP.

I must haste!

PRIORESS.

The hope of what?

PHILIP.

Peace, sister! hear me speak—

This Count has cast his net upon a stake—
 So far the purpose of his treason fails.
 He climbs so high to reach an empty nest:
 The bird is flown! Why tarry in the wind
 Rocked to and fro 'twixt hate and mockery?
 He cannot bide up there alone! He finds
 No hostage, as he hoped, nor plea for violence—
 No tenure but a thief's, who must appear
 At last, descending from the chimney's top,
 So much the blacker as he stays the longer.
 The page who brought this message, takes me back.

PRIORESS.

Is Ursula faithful, thinkest—or has he learnt
That what is lost is here ?

PHILIP.

He had not learnt,
When these came from him, that he was a loser ;
But held the unopened casket in his hand,
Nor doubted if the pearl were there or no.
I run to mis-direct pursuit from us
By asking access in her father's name—
Demanding what is missed as if he hid it.
Guile in defence is not injurious,
When, like the lapwing's feignings of distress,
It cries the loudest farthest from mischance.
Count Albert must not look toward Rolandswerth !—
The gods he served are desecrated—praise—
The majesty of honor. He that spurns
His ancient worship, will deal worse with ours,
Defenceless truth and innocence afraid.
Our gates are weaker than the castle's were.

PRIORESS.

He will not seek her here ?

PHILIP.

Sister, he will ;
If he shall hope to find her here, he must ;
Constrained by shame to darn his tattered treachery,
And tack advantage as a fringe to fraud.
Daughter, be prisoner to thy promise still—
Lock up this secret, give the key to us !—
Who leave their wits behind thrive ill abroad :
Let me not doubt of mischief while away :
Thou wilt not draw the veil from off thy face,
Till I come back.

ELLEN.

To none beside my father.

PHILIP.

Thy father !—none beside thy father, sayest ?
Marry, this cuts our counsel short enough !
The mystery need not borrow of our brains.
Tell thou thy father—let me tell the Count !
Lo, this is all I wished thee not to do !
Whom else wouldst hide thee from ?

ELLEN.

But why from him?

He is as wise as we are.

PHILIP.

Not to-night.

ELLEN.

Philip, he will endure as he sees me.
His knowledge cannot reach to Rolandseck.

PRIORESS.

Wouldst tell him,—why?

ELLEN.

To make his misery less.

PHILIP.

Child, he has sent defiance by this page;
Proclaimed the Count a traitor, as he is—
And coward, which he is not. This must be hushed,
Or will be answered.

PRIORESS.

What dost purpose, then?

PHILIP.

To humble both while each believes her lost,
And waken hope, in both, to repossess.
To keep their hate apart, then tread it out.
They cannot tarry as they are. The Count
Has sold his honor for an empty house,
At last not his. My lord will fear to leave
His child up there; and of his too great pride
Abate a part to ransom her.

ELLEN.

Then go—

Make haste—I will do any thing!

PHILIP.

Do this.

ELLEN.

Let me be veiled, and see him so—I will!
Trust me, he shall not know me.

PHILIP.

We risk all!

I must be gone—Well, kneel, child—look this way—
Swear by the altar, and by her before it!
The baron shall not learn thy presence here
Till I come back!

PRIORESS.

If thou shouldst not come back ?

PHILIP.

Release her, in my name, at break of day.
Do as thy wisdom teaches thee.

ELLEN.

I swear !

PHILIP.

It is a vow to God—and by her soul
Make it, and keep it, awfully !

ELLEN.

I will !

PHILIP.

The altar and the grave are witnesses.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

*On the Island. A boat and boatmen seen by moonlight at
some distance. The Castle on the farther side of the Rhine.*

SCREITCH and HUBERT.

HUBERT.

I may not tarry longer for this priest.
The words we bear are winged like thunder-bolts :
Their echo will be louder than themselves.
Do thou stay here.

SCREITCH.

I must—to gather breath.

HUBERT.

All spent so soon ? How shalt thou reach the height
Whence Barbara sends her sighs to meet and greet thee ?
With clearer wind-pipe sobs the sea-horse drowning !
A leaden Cupid at a Dutchman's gate
Might blush for such a worshipper.—Canst guess
Why both these masters speed their errands thus—
The old and new one chuck thee to and fro ?
Canst tell me why ?

SCREITCH.

I can.

HUBERT.

Then do.

SCREITCH.

The nurse
Is seen to travel at her weanling's heels,
With hand outstretched to pluck him from the dirt,
And rod to stir remembrance of mischance.
Now for this page's prate of Barbara !

HUBERT.

Wouldst learn her doings—what she is about ?
She laughs, and lengthens yet her holiday.
She sits with Rudestein and the Count at supper.
She thinks and speaks of thee—thy love, thy learning,
Thy vigilance to-night, thine embassy.
All three have shining faces through thy means,
But look for larger mirth at thy return.

SCREITCH.

It is a sin to lie if men will credit ;
A silly sin to lie when none believes.

HUBERT.

Thou sayest so, Seneschal, of whom ?

SCREITCH.

A page
Whose birth, breath, breeding, have none other use.
Rudestein is dead.

HUBERT.

Then lies will be the less.
He must have been a page, or page-begot—
Page-bred, page-principled, and propertied.
We found him at the gate—and thou shalt find him
With empty flasks and Bab on either hand.
Haply she told thee of his death ?

SCREITCH.

She did.

HUBERT.

Then Barbara is a page in petticoats.
A Christian soldier lies ?

SCREITCH.

Ay, many do.

HUBERT.

Art ready, Seneschal ?

SCREITCH.

For what ?

HUBERT.

For death.

(*Draws.*)

SCREITCH.

A Christian Seneschal is always ready.

Once since the sunset have I thought me nearer,
But now the readier if thou saidst the truth.
My lord believes me faithless—Barbara is—
Behold, child, I defy thee!

HUBERT.

Get thy breath :
Unsheathe, and then stand fast.

SCREITCH.

I yield my neck,
As Tullius did to those from Anthony.
The sheath is all I have.

HUBERT.

'Twas all I left thee.
Yon bright moon sees me blush.—Here comes the Father.

Enter Philip.

PHILIP.

The Seneschal is old in suffering wrongs,
And like the old, forgets.

HUBERT.

Let there be peace—
On my part love and honour, Seneschal.

PHILIP.

Make me partaker in this league. There is
Enough of wrath elsewhere.

HUBERT.

With all my heart.

PHILIP.

We need not be the merchants of men's hate:
Contention wants not us to speed its traffic.
The peaceful lips are blessed.

HUBERT.

Father, thou hast
No Lord but one who cannot be disgraced—
I keep aloof, mine may.

PHILIP.

Hast thou but one ?
And is he honoured best by doing ill ?
Best served by worst of services ? Wouldst pick
The straws which misery scatters in its haste,
And bind them up as gleanings for the cruel ?
His honour who has robbed the house he dwelt in,
Requires to slay his host ! If such thy calling,
It is accursed.

HUBERT.

And if dogs felt as men,
I should run mad, to carry in my mouth
No matter what, or what its filthiness.
To chase my last kind feeder out of doors,
And tear grief's freshest robes like beggar's rags.
The Baron was a soldier once—he knows
The shortest way to justice. Here, at least,
He is not rash, but wise.

SCREITCH.

I fain would stake
His white hairs now 'gainst this Count Albert's black,
Were grief away which makes the helmet heavy,
And care which dries the bones.

PHILIP.

It must not be.

HUBERT.

Father, it were the best for both of them !
The loser gains.

PHILIP.

There is one more to think for :
What hath she done amiss ? Thyself art young—
Youth should be pitiful.

HUBERT.

If all my blood
Might save the shedding of but half her tears,
It should run every drop !—Does God forsake her,
So fair and innocent as she is ? Speak out—
I fear as little as thyself. The Count
Has lost a princely name since yesterday ;
And some who serve him, blush for him. Foul love
And this suggesting traitor, damn us all !
This piebald Rudestein ! Shall I tell him so ?

PHILIP.

Tell truth, but wisely—make this challenge air—
The breath of wrath and rashness, as it was.

HUBERT.

Instruct me as we go. The boat there, Gregory !
This way the bank gives safest footing, Screitch :
Tread where the moon shines—here are steps of stone.

SCREITCH.

It is a youth whose breeding should be cared for :
I will bestow some pains.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.

Night. Chamber in the Castle.

COUNT ALBERT and BARBARA.

COUNT.

Hast found her, Barbara?

BARBARA.

We have searched thrice through
All places that are possible to hide in,
And thrice as many that are not, my lord—
But still we cannot find her.

COUNT.

Where is Ursula?

BARBARA.

Safely locked up.

COUNT.

Her tears are passionless—
I doubt this close composure.

BARBARA.

I do not.

Her grief is sullen, as it used to be :
Feebler she is in pride than heretofore,
But else unchanged.

COUNT.

Then let us search again.

Enter Rudestein.

What comfort, Rudestein?

RUDESTAIN.

Worse than none at all !
A hundred torches lend their light to find
Despair instead of it.

COUNT.

Begin once more !
She could not quite expend herself in sighs—
Fine as that body is, it must have substance.
Walls such as these were partly built to hide in ;
What seemed compact of rock had caves scooped out—
Panting and listening, like a frightened fawn,
She stoops in one of these.

RUDESTAIN.

How late didst see her ?—
And where, Bah, was it ?

BARBARA.

When the sun went down :
And in the chamber opening to her bed :—
Not where she sleeps, but next this side of it.

RUDESTEIN.

She must have issued by the public stairs—
Or through the casement, like a lark uncaged !
I have slept there before this bird was hatched.
Her nest is in a tower on three sides naked,
With slanting battlements, and foot advanced,
As treading giddily on such a height.
Its walls are solid—both the lights one way.
A mossy sort of ledge for briars and weeds,
Where the rock mingles with the masonry
Confounding which is which, is all beneath them
From height to depth, between the daws and fishes.

BARBARA.

She has not ventured there !

COUNT.

Is it possible ?

BARBARA.

She would not do it !

COUNT.

But could she if she would ?
Is the thought possible ?

RUDESTEIN.

She dared not think it.
Who searched that chamber first ?

BARBARA.

I followed Ursula.

RUDESTEIN.

Were both the casements closed ?

BARBARA.

No—one was not.

COUNT.

How far beneath the window is that ledge ?
Could any venture on it ?

RUDESTEIN.

With a rope,
Or some such aidance, hanging from above—
Not else, though light as Harlequin.

BARBARA.

And yet

The footing seems less perilous than it is,
Benched out by briars and wall-flowers.

RUDESTEIN.

Trusting to it,
The world were dear against a new-laid egg.
And she!—a lamb at play were scarce so shy!

BARBARA.

At play she was—in earnest, I have seen
Her eyes look like her father's.

COUNT.

So have I
The last time that I saw them—or shall see them
If what we fear be so!

BARBARA.

It cannot be!

COUNT.

Else are we damned unprofitably, Bab!

RUDESTEIN.

Well, what says Ursula to it?—bring her in. [*Exit Barbara.*
I could believe that one might take this leap,
Who thought not of the next as sure to follow.
The fearful are the desperate when pursued.
The lion goes straight, the hare flies any where.
This fawn has tried the brambles, perhaps!

Enter Ursula and Barbara.

We talk

Of hares and hunting, mistress Ursula.
But look—such doublings as might mend our sport,
With mirth and better leisure for the chase,
Are dangerous now! Hast thought on what I said?

COUNT.

We that have gone so far, shall not turn back.

RUDESTEIN.

Wilt wipe thy tears, and tell us of thy mistress?

URSULA.

Barbara was with me, ask her where she is.

RUDESTEIN.

Wouldst rather have one husband, or a score?
Speak, thou brine-sodden idiot!

URSULA.

We left together—
We two went out to see the guests assemble—
My lady staid behind us; Barbara knows it.

o

COUNT.

Behind you where?

URSULA.

The chamber next her bed.
 The door between was closed when I returned.
 How could I press on grief at such a season?
 The bells chimed still, the chaunt was heard up there!
 I have not seen her since.

RUDESTAIN.

How long didst wait?

URSULA.

Till Screitch and Barbara found me there—they first,
 And soon his grace.

COUNT.

But was the door closed still?

URSULA.

Your highness saw me knock, and made me enter.

COUNT.

Were both the casements shut?

URSULA.

But one of them.

Barbara was with me, let her speak.

COUNT.

Could grief

Have made thy mistress desperate?

URSULA.

Terror might.

BARBARA.

Shame on so base a thought!

COUNT.

Terror at what?

URSULA.

Your highness—Barbara's cries to hide herself—
 So sick and broken-hearted as she was,
 The Rhine might seem the least unmerciful.

RUDESTAIN.

We give thee leave to follow. Take her back—
 Lock the door fast, and set the casements open.

[*Exeunt Ursula and Barbara.*]

COUNT.

She speaks the truth!

RUDESTAIN.

Well, spur her to the leap—

Prick her on both flanks. Drown thee in the Rhine!
Leap from thy love, my pretty peevish cousin!

COUNT.

Better the vessel perish than the freight!
We pirates gain the wreck of Rolandseck,
Its wealth washed out. Her father may reclaim it!

RUDESTEIN.

I prophesied so much.

Enter Barbara, with Philip, Scritch, and Hubert.

BARBARA.

Your grace beholds
The two ambassadors come back!

RUDESTEIN.

And this
That dove-like bears his olive-branch between them—
Welcome thyself and tidings, father Philip!

PHILIP.

Who was it made thee host at Rolandseck?
Which of the two is master here? I crave
No larger welcome than sufficed for these.

COUNT.

What audience hadst thou, Hubert? Speak thou first—
Hast seen the lord of Weilenberg?

HUBERT.

I have—
And sealed your grace's faith beneath mine own
For equal payment of the patience shown me.

COUNT.

Then he was patient?

HUBERT.

Sparingly at first—
Awhile he seemed perplexed by what we told him,
Confounding names, and hasty through mistakes.
Which was his house he knew not—that or this.
He marvelled at a message dated hence,
And carried from your highness by his guest—
For so far he remembered me:—his friends,
His kinsmen, people, followers, oddly mixed—
His daughter here, her mother in the church—
He scarce could understand me.

COUNT.

When he did?

HUBERT.

He swooned, my lord—but like a wrestler fallen,
 The first time shorn of victory by mischance—
 He blamed his heedlessness, the ground, the weather,
 Diminished rest in sleep—his cloak was heavy,
 His thoughts distract—the game was falsely played,
 The treachery manifest, he said—but chief
 He ill endured that we should see him thus.
 Some hasty words he dropped about your grace—
 There had been hate between your house and his,
 But neither party sat the other's guests
 And ate them out a wider way to treason—
 Nor would they wait to strike whom death had stricken.

RUDESTAIN.

A clerkly page it is, and wise withal !
 I see the hallowed candlestick behind him
 Whence falls the illumination !

COUNT.

What beside ?

Hast lost the answer that I sent thee for ?
 What said he of his daughter, boy ?

HUBERT.

It was

Of her he talked so giddily, my lord :
 And for her liberty would risk his age,
 Though hurried onward past its speed of late.
 Your highness is a soldier—so was he !

RUDESTAIN.

Good cheer down yonder, Scritch ?—these two are drunk !
 The Prioress gives her best ?—What said thy lord ?

SCREITCH.

Of thee ? he thinks thee dead—I told him so—
 As Barbara taught me—slain before the gate !
 Fie on thee, Bab ! thou hast reported falsely !

BARBARA.

He fought as well as thou didst. Odds and chance
 O'erthrow the mightiest ! What says Seneca ?

SCREITCH.

He stood a traitor at his kinsman's gate !
 He sold his birth-place to the Count for gold !
 The inheritance of his fathers !

RUDESTAIN.

Stop awhile !

Dost call me traitor ?

SCREITCH.

Ay, a second time.

Remount me on the horse thou borrowedst from me,
And let me make it good.

HUBERT.

Stand off, and loose him—

He says the truth.

SCREITCH.

Be thou attorney for me :

I loathe to lay mine hand upon a thief.

COUNT.

Give me this message, father, as it is :
And shorten pity's rhetoric—to the point—
Let slip the repetition of remorse.
What would the Baron fight with me about?
His house and child?—the stakes are lost already.
We shall be soon too near akin for strife :
First let me ask his blessing.

PHILIP.

I will seek

No pity toward my lord, nor from your grace :
Both are too proud for that ! Scorn scarce can reach
So high as his grey head : the imperial crown
Would rest henceforth unhonored on thine own.
The Baron asks that I may see his child.

RUDESTEIN.

To licence fraud—suggest obduracy.
A triple twist, fool, priest, and priest's apprentice !
Put them all three in ward.

COUNT.

See her for what ?

PHILIP.

I needs must sink the privilege of my place.
Our conference may be here, or where you please.

COUNT.

Hast thou not seen her once to-day ?

PHILIP.

Three times.

Such days come seldom—I have seen her thrice—
I saw her here at sunset.

COUNT.

Wait without.

(Exeunt Philip and Screitch.).

RUDESTEIN.

This nursing politician, take him too !
 There may be gossip worth his gathering.
 The key-holes and his ears are ancient friends—
 Beware to leave the door ajar.

HUBERT.

I might
 List long, nor hear so foul a knave again.

RUDESTEIN.

I cannot seat thee in the stocks to-night.
 They and the whipping-post are out of doors—
 Tarry till breakfast time.

HUBERT.

I know the place—
 Between the gate and drawbridge, where we found thee
 A step this side the gallows.

COUNT.

Let him go !
 Hubert, stand from him. Strike who will again,
 My turn comes next. Boy, what has made thee mad?—
 Give me the sword, I say—and get to bed.

HUBERT.

I will not serve in fellowship like this.
 The sight of those white hairs has made me mad—
 Of him so great, now friendless and betrayed !
 Shame makes me mad !

(Hubert throws his sword on the ground, and exit.)

COUNT.

Place him in ward there—go !
(The Count, Rudestein, and Barbara remain.)

COUNT.

The fiend that owns and helps thee, baulk and blast thee—
 Then leave thee blacker than himself, thou beast !
 Art drunk to-night again ?—Whose loss is perilled ?
 What canst thou lose or hazard ? honor—love ?
 What farther infamy can touch to harm thee ?
 Why shouldst thou fear disgrace ? Canst hear the hiss
 Which makes me giddy ? Art thou damned, as I am,
 For being a fool alone ?

BARBARA.

My lord, this page
 Called not your grace a traitor.

COUNT.

But he did—

Traitor and traitor-teacher, mistress Bab.
Hast lost both wits and womanhood?—thine ears
As well as honesty? He called me traitor!
I lack the advantages of ancient use:
I am not yet at ease, like you, with baseness!
To me scorn's breath stinks still!

RUDESTEIN.

Discourse well timed,
And eloquent withal, to teach me patience!
Temperance sets forth its praises to the drunk!—
Well, let us profit by it, mistress mine!
Behold the great exemplar, Bab! Ten tongues
Are telling all by this time: Father Philip
Hath filled his scrip with news to marvel at.
My cousin is lost, her father may defy us—
Let him go back and say so!

COUNT.

He bides here.

We must do what we mean to do at once.
Shall we prevent this rumour, and be gone?
Our better choice is lost! The daughter safe,
Love's wrongs had helped us with the vulgar sort,
And pride been blamed which would not yield to tears.
Now are we thieves and murderers!

RUDESTEIN.

Treat, then, treat!

Affect the conqueror—henceforth pity moves you;
And so make peace, sir. Till the game is lost,
I keep my cards. She may be found, perhaps, yet.
Assure thee that my kinsman thinks her here—
Search him, and sift him thoroughly. Take heed
That not a whisper pass the gates before thee—
Hold these three fast awhile.

COUNT.

How treat? by whom?

The envoys are locked up. He thinks thee dead.

RUDESTEIN.

But then I died with credit at the gate.
Your highness slew me there. To this extent—
Half-killed, and sorely wounded for his sake,
Thrust out of doors, your grace's challenger—
To this extent he might believe me faithful,

Remembering how we hated one another.
And if he disbelieved me—well, what then ?
We are but where we were. I care not which—
One needs must go, and presently.

COUNT.

Make haste !

When servants shake their heads, our state looks sick—
I must not leave them here. It matters little,
Now that the prize we played for falls to neither,
Who wins the seconds takes. (*Exit Count.*)

RUDESTEIN.

They fall to me.

Fiend-tempted I !—a fool—and drunk beside !
This page may call me traitor ! cuff me too !
I looked for this, but scarce on this side Christmas.
He pays us early in the oldest coin.

BARBARA.

Part that he said was true !

RUDESTEIN.

Of womanhood ?

I do not quarrel with him for its truth.

BARBARA.

This jostling of your blood and policy.
Mark him when eyes are on him, how sedate !
And yet, at heart, as mad as Hercules.

RUDESTEIN.

It is my turn to make thee marvel, Barbara.
Do thou mark me, child.—Judge whose devil is wisest,
Is boldest, nimblest, strongest—his or mine.
Now comes the consummation, mistress Bab !
'Tis time to serve ourselves. All hopeless is it ?
I never felt so pleased, or sped more surely.
This girl is in the Rhine—her father is
Where he shall rest a hundred years. The Count—
The love-sick Count—is sick of sin beside,
And sick of solitude, and sick of us—
Marry, the Count is sick of Rolandseck !
Quick ! quick, child—run beside me to the boat !
And study what I teach thee as we go—
Thou shalt be mistress here before we sleep. [*Exeunt.*]

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Chamber in the Priory.

ELLEN and PRIORESS.

PRIORESS.

The fruit is newly plucked, and we have bread.
Let both appear officious when he comes.
Place the wine this side, daughter: 'tis our best—
His thirst may not discern how far from good.

ELLEN.

He promised what was asked of him?

PRIORESS.

At once,
And will disperse his followers through the isle.
Such patience grieves me for my thoughts of late.
"This house is yours; I come a guest"—he said,
"And will not stain its sanctity with blood.
There shall be no strife here."

ELLEN.

Speak tenderly—
His heart is softer than it was.

PRIORESS.

The change
From pride to penitence were blessed of late,
Till this new shame rekindled what was quenched.

ELLEN.

I would approach his holier thoughts, thus veiled
Till I may show myself.

PRIORESS.

Be careful then!
I must yield what was promised, yet I fear.
Our brother's wisdom walks twixt scorn and hate,
Whose sole assuagement is the dread to lose thee.
Let us not mar these labours.

ELLEN.

I have asked

The strength I need with more humility.
Again my mother's voice is in mine ear—
I shall not fail.

PRIORESS.

Beware! (*Enter Weilenberg.*)

WEILENBERG.

The crowd is gone;
A portion scattered in the search of bread.
We cannot aid the lost—and for myself,
I stand where none like these may interpose.—
A burden on your charity so long,
My thoughts are how to ease it.

PRIORESS.

Our chief shame
Is that we look so sparing of our duties,
And cold in hospitality to-night:
Like thankless children of the world shut out,
We seem to learn ingratitude betimes—
Obsequious only when we cannot profit:
It makes me blush to deal by measure now!
The servants of my lord must bide elsewhere:
Our rule gives refuge but to life pursued.

WEILENBERG.

I may crave entrance for my messengers?
If any from the castle knock to-night,
They shall come in?

PRIORESS.

It is directed so,
And what we can, provided.

WEILENBERG.

Then adieu!

PRIORESS.

Let me beseech my lord to take good heed—
We stand behind the altar where we are:
A grate divides us from the sanctuary
Pannelled with this before it.

(*She opens a pannel in the waintscot.*)

God forbid
That violence come thus near to sacrilege!
If so, a step will place beyond its reach.
I pray remember this, my lord.

WEILENBERG.

I will.

PRIORESS.

Daughter, stay thou till I come back again.

Wait till I call or send. Watch well the door !
A novice of the house, herself unhappy,
Has learned to grieve with misery, though so young.
Her patience shames our haste. The Saint deceased
Loved her the best of all our younger sort :
She found similitude in growth and voice
To her we tremble for ; but this poor child
Is almost friendless now.

WEILENBERG.

Her own is quite—

In this they differ.

PRIORESS.

Past eleven o'clock !

The midnight service leaves me scarce an hour.

[*Exit.*

WEILENBERG.

So young, and so unhappy, as she says ?
May God forbid !

ELLEN.

The Prioress leaves me here

That I may learn to suffer.

WEILENBERG.

She forgets

That grief speeds best and easiest out of sight.
Ours cannot help each other.

ELLEN.

Then farewell :

Your Lordship's thoughts are far too high for mine :
Greatness may gain by scorn, what such as I
Must ask with tears.

WEILENBERG.

What may it gain ?

ELLEN.

Endurance.

WEILENBERG.

Thy means are safest, child. I have no tears.
I that have caused them daily—for whose sake
They fell so fast, have none. What else we learn,
Is what I taught—a task of twenty years—
To bear and hold my peace. I am hard-hearted—
The Prioress tells the truth.

ELLEN.

She says not so.

WEILENBERG.

Being good, she may forbear to say so now :
But yet she loved her friend and patroness.

ELLEN.

Not more than I.

WEILENBERG.

Too proud for such endurance ?
Who was it told thee so, if she did not ?

ELLEN.

I said too high, my lord.

WEILENBERG.

Couldst love so much,
Yet spare to pity ? Or didst see that face—
Pale as the marble saints around it now—
And not discern its tears ?

ELLEN.

I pitied too.

WEILENBERG.

Pitied and loved ?—dost know who grieved and killed her ?
Who brought her where she is—who murdered her ?
She did not trust thee, or she told thee that—
Who broke her heart ? Heaven bless your charity !
A gracious office this of tendering comfort !
Old curses are too swift for such young prayers.
Behold the tyrant in his cage at last !
He has not one on earth who loves or pities—
The last that did, has left it. Why shouldst weep ?
I have no wife to grieve and persecute—
No child to shame and frighten. God is just—
The roof above my head is not mine own ;
And she who hides me here, would hiss me out,
But spares her breath awhile through charity !—
Dost love my daughter too ?

ELLEN.

Myself no more.

WEILENBERG.

She is as young, and now as miserable.
Weep for them both—not me.

ELLEN.

O, peace !

WEILENBERG.

Those tears
Should make us friends for her sake. Canst believe
That, cruel as I am, I loved her too ?
We talked of patience, art alone like her ?

ELLEN.

The same, my lord.

WEILENBERG.

Not helpless as she is ?

ELLEN.

Some pity me—
There is none left to help me—they are lost
Who loved me best. I have no friend but you.

WEILENBERG.

But me ?

ELLEN.

You said my tears should make us friends.
My father is as I.

WEILENBERG.

Thou hast one then ?

ELLEN.

And so has she.

WEILENBERG.

The more her grief in having !

ELLEN.

Mine is so poor, he has no home for either.

WEILENBERG.

'Twas wiser quit the world, than stay to hate it.

ELLEN.

They say that we should hate it—yet till now
I knew not why we should. To me it seemed
Like Him who made it, holy. I loved its flowers—
Its living creatures were my pleasant friends :
The streams were fair, the mountains beautiful—
Nor knew I better than the birds in spring
How to despise its gifts and be unhappy.
They too have some who chase and persecute !
Even what is ill, I knew not how to hate.

WEILENBERG.

Thou hast lived long in little time, and yet
Been gently nursed, it seems ?

ELLEN.

Alas, too gently !
Met by fond smiles and open hands stretched out ;
Praised, watched for, waited on. I live to see
How merciless is one who said he loved me.
Let me confess so much—I love the cruel—
My father's misery is through me.

WEILENBERG.

Alas !

—Be patient, and he may forgive thee yet.
The hard-hearted love their children.

ELLEN.

What forgive?

WEILENBERG.

That shame.

ELLEN.

It is not his—sorrow I bring him,
But ignorantly, not shame. Did I say shame?

WEILENBERG.

Methought you did. This swoon bewilders me—
The traitor's hand is hard upon my throat:
The bell which brought us here, tolls farther off:
My daughter's voice is on thy lips!—All sounds
Abuse me thus.—Thou lovest this father still?

ELLEN.

So does your daughter you, my lord.

WEILENBERG.

Art sure?

ELLEN.

Why not?

WEILENBERG.

Be sure of nothing!—ask no more.
He has been always good?

ELLEN.

To me he has.

WEILENBERG.

Thou didst not tremble when his steps drew near;
Nor think which way to hide thee? Why dost weep?
He did not kill thy mother?

ELLEN.

Pray forbear!

WEILENBERG.

Why dost thou weep? I, that have been all this,
And done all this, cannot!

Enter Prioress.

PRIORESS.

Be gone, child—quick!

There is a messenger whose haste knocks hard—
But neither of the two we waited for—
Your lordship's kinsman.

WEILENBERG.

Rudestein? I forget,
But surely some one told me he was dead.

PRIORESS.

His arm is bandaged, and he speaks with pain.
Go, hide thee, daughter—that way—by the grate.
Remember where it leads.

ELLEN.

I shall stay there ;
And may be called, if needed.

PRIORESS.

Get thee gone !

Exeunt Ellen and Prioress, different ways. Enter Rudestein.

WEILENBERG.

A double treason in one night ? They lied
Who said that death had shortened infamy :
Both hope and faith die first.

RUDESTAIN.

And charity !
I have outlived all three of them ! Ah me,
The greatest was but small !

WEILENBERG.

What price art sold for ?

RUDESTAIN.

I stand upon my bargain with the Count,
The payment follows when the work is done.
I have earned nothing from him yet.

WEILENBERG.

For what ?

RUDESTAIN.

For treachery—I come hither to that end.
Nothing is done—through lack of means to do it.
There was no trust, and therefore none betrayed.
I gain but cuffs which laid my wits asleep,
With here and there a hole beside. The same
Who told that I was dead, believed his eyes :
I thought so too.

WEILENBERG.

Count Albert sent thee hither ?

RUDESTAIN.

He did.

WEILENBERG.

For what ?

RUDESTAIN.

For treachery, as I said.

He quits me of some crowns I lost and borrowed :
 He heals the wounds he gave me. Twice this week
 My life was in his hands. I shall have gold—
 A large and careless rental—what I please.
 Beside that all ingratitude is sin,
 There be some vanities, as wine, dice, women,
 Which my good lord of yesterday eschews,
 But free to him and me.

WEILENBERG.

What should these purchase ?

RUDESTEIN.

Treachery, once more—I say the third time, treachery.
 My mission hither is with line and hook.
 I shall be trusted now as one that hates him—
 Been baffled by him, beaten, wounded, laughed at
 This second time, and all within a week.
 Behold the ambassador ! I come for peace.
 The Father Philip preaches it up yonder.

WEILENBERG.

Peace suits his temper quite as well as thine.

RUDESTEIN.

It is from his suggestion. He is wise :
 Yet darkly sees the things which profit here—
 Calls silver dross—and when he needs must lie,
 Looks down ashamed. This dross is dear to me :
 Your lordship's son-in-law will furnish it.
 Concluding thus, he trusts me.

WEILENBERG.

What to do ?

RUDESTEIN.

To catch and cage my cousin. The Count is thrifty !
 He will not squander more of his good name
 Than buys the equivalent—a maid through love,
 A barony through ambition. He would keep
 Possession in the Castle by consent :
 And silence cavils with your lordship's leave.
 The time for gathering eye-brows has passed by—
 His choice is ours—we choose by him as proxy.
 It is provided that you go with me.
 So stipulate that sorrow have its dues—
 Rebuke impatience, put the wedding off,
 Provide the nuptial covenants ere the feast,
 Then fill a corner near the Christmas fire :
 Let loose authority, as weary of it.

Withdraw thine age from care ! Go softly with him,
No doubt you shall be waited on.

WEILENBERG.

He says so ?

RUDESTAIN.

This tarrying here is scandal to us all !

WEILENBERG.

What said he to the message by his page ?

RUDESTAIN.

He hangs his mirth upon the challenge-bearers—
Is pleasant in comparisons between you :
Shall be your son-in-law instead, he says :
Proposes peace, which granted or refused,
He makes alliance with you.

WEILENBERG.

Is this all ?

RUDESTAIN.

No—for I have from Ellen a deal beside.
You must go home—be housed, and clothed, and tended—
Be comforted, and reconciled, and pleased,
Whether you will or no. She would be grieved
To see her father, head and heels across,
Strapped on his saddle, like a butcher's calf—
In this guise carried home to Rolandseck.

WEILENBERG.

She will not see it.

RUDESTAIN.

Philip fills the time

Till I go back, with reasonings on his office.
He chides them both, and bravely lays about him :
Calls Screitch an owl for letting mischief in—
He does indeed !

WEILENBERG.

Then Screitch did let it in ?

RUDESTAIN.

He did not keep it out—so much appears.
Our seneschal is honest, and he is
In this like me, that I am like an ass.
Screitch sent his porters to replace the guests—
They feasted, while he watched with Barbara ;
And she sent him to speak of both the Plinies.
The gate and bridge were as my cousin had left them.
Wisely Screitch talked as comforter within,

P

THE ALBERT stopped the argument. My Lord
Must summon Cupid for his damages ;
The girls did what he taught.

WEILENBERG.

Did Barbara ?

RUDESTEIN.

AY, truly did she—Barbara, Ursula, Ellen.
Who wars with Love, will have the maids against him.
Poor souls, they meant no harm.

WEILENBERG.

My daughter too ?

RUDESTEIN.

Yea, though she be your daughter—he has teased,
Ere now, the daughter of as great a man.

WEILENBERG.

They sold the child, and lie of her.

RUDESTEIN.

Perhaps so :

The privilege of their calling is to lie,
And lover's gold its fairest perquisite.
My cousin is young and guileless—both excuse her.
Bab owns her share outright, while Ursula weeps.

WEILENBERG.

The blessed sacrament between their teeth,
I would not credit either.

RUDESTEIN.

No !—why so ?

They reckoned not on doing aught of ill.
It was Love's wile. The Count had been pushed out,
Adieu prohibited, old forms cut short,
No parting sighs allowed on either side,
No tokens of celibacy for aye—
No, not a tear. They thought to mend all this ;
Looked for the Count who should come in to weep,
And so depart again. He came and laughs,
Nor will he quit. They shall be sharply chidden.
Why, what dost groan and break thine heart about ?
A scullery porringer is burst to sherds—
Who cares, or frowns upon the penny-waster ?
Your crystal chalice is let fall—the knave
Must suffer stripes proportioned to its cost.
But is this just ?

WEILENBERG.

Get home again—begone !

RUDESTEIN.

My fairy-footed cousin is in love—
She must forswear, she will forswear her dear :
But face to face, by rule and precedent.
Could she foretell his lack of modesty ?
And now this love is so profuse of tears !
She is so vehement in his chastisement !
Good sooth ! my little play-fellow !

WEILENBERG.

False, false !

RUDESTEIN.

Our tempest will abate its spite at last—
The skies grow calm again—therefore be merry—
Fight not with Cupid, or take better heed—
You quite forget his wings.

(Weilenberg sits down and covers his face.)

WEILENBERG.

Could she deceive me ?

RUDESTEIN.

Not for the sun and moon, in aught but love.
Hast lived so long to trust, when maids eschew him ?
Ah ! my good lord's philosophy ! he strives
To dam the current of five thousand years,
And change all nature since the flood !

WEILENBERG.

So soon ?

Her mother's burial too !

RUDESTEIN.

Why, then or never.

'Tis pitiful to see her, how she weeps—
How passionate she is against the Count—
Nay, faith, imperious and disdainful too.
She spares him not a whit—My pretty cousin !—
He shall not thrust her father out of doors ;
He shall not do so longer than is needed.

WEILENBERG.

Does she say this ?—I know that it is needed—
But would not have her say so.

RUDESTEIN.

What is that ?

A cry ! a sob !—there must be listeners here.
Hark, yet ! Methought so.—Well, I will go back.
Beware this Count, who laughs at all of us,

With not a word. A rather + rather —
 "He speaks language + action and beauty—
 "Innocent like himself—a sin—sin villain.
 But where and where? He may not be true.
 "Heard he would not speak if he were true.
 And with me when he wants me after all.
 "I have seen your own mouth in itself sometimes—
 "Sings, not and sings—his will is the
 "My power would in such and such time.
 "You are not alone—his time is not in your
 "The speech is not the meaning of —
 "The word is not the word of young man.
 "The person is not as the person and person.
 "To say and say this—his will is not indeed—
 "The word is not the word of the person.
 "To say and say, and say this person—
 "The word is not the word of the person.
 "And where the person is not the person.
 "Good night, and I, at last."

WEILENBERG.

Poison me?

RUDESTEIN.

If I do in restiveness, not else.
 Look how this scandal must breed worse than noise!
 The Count at Kildandock, thyself down here—
 Two lords, two claimants—such a cry abroad!
 Ten thousand tongues against him! What is this?
 (*Takes the cup from the table.*)
 These careful sisters placed it here? Is it wine?
 Fruit, bread, and what beside?

WEILENBERG.

I have not tasted.

RUDESTEIN.

With leave, I will taste first then. Verjuice brewed
 "Twixt crabs and sourest Rhine-grapes mixed with Rhine.
 I need not call for drink as sick and feeble—
 So far the means are furnished me. Now mark
 The sleight he taught so like a mountebank.
 I trifle with the cup—sip carelessly—
 Replace, resume, employ thine ears and eyes,
 Hiding the phial in my palm the while—
 Thou shouldst have watched me better, coz.

WEILENBERG.

For what?

RUDESTEIN.

The artifice he taught me.

WEILENBERG.

What hast done ?

RUDESTEIN.

Have drugged the wine.

WEILENBERG.

Poisoned !—it is not poisoned ?

RUDESTEIN.

Taste, then, and try, coz.—it is strongly poisoned !
The mightiest fiends must turn him out of doors
As he does us ! He changed the dice, I know !
His hand is easy—he has practised this !
The physic might have come without a label,
Therefore I came myself. 'Tis mightiest poison !
Now will I cast it out, and cleanse the cup.
Beware his messengers, with what they bring thee ;
Or yield at once ! I will not leave it here—
Sorrow is careless.

WEILENBERG.

Let the cup stand ! be gone !

Dost think I trust thee ?

RUDESTEIN.

It would kill a score !

Whether or no, I will not leave it here—
It shall not bide behind me !

WEILENBERG.

Get thee hence—

RUDESTEIN.

Forbear to press my arm !—Well—gently—so—

[Exit.

Ellen advances from the gate.

ELLEN.

Is the cup poisoned ?

WEILENBERG.

What—and if it be ?

ELLEN.

Poisoned !

WEILENBERG.

He says it is. Go thou to bed !

ELLEN.

Think where we are.

WEILENBERG.

I do so heedfully—
And feel content to tarry where I am.
I need no nursing—if I did, there is
Provision for it in my daughter's house.
Go thou to bed!

ELLEN.

That cup has poison in it?

WEILENBERG.

Thou art not asked to drink with me—be gone!
Who taught to hide and listen?

ELLEN.

I meant no wrong;
But thought my lord allowed of it.

WEILENBERG.

Hast heard
What that man said? There are degrees of misery—
Rest thou content with thine.

ELLEN.

Do you believe him?
If so, be patient by the rule you give me—
There still is greater misery.

WEILENBERG.

Whose is so?

ELLEN.

Your daughter's—she is judged, and yet is guiltless!
A father's curse is only less than God's:
And you, who judge, will curse her! Trust her still—
For her sake, and her mother's sake, forbear!
O do not curse her, if she have done wrong!
You two may meet no more.

WEILENBERG.

I judge and curse!
Why thou fantastic fool—who thought to curse her?
Whatever she may do, I never will!
One innocent spirit has fled the tyranny—
The other changes in its just defence.
This child was good—I taught her to betray me.
Even yet she pities me, and takes my part:
She will not punish farther than is needed—
Her doors shall still be opened if I knock:
I am shut out to humble me: she sees
Her mother's tears.

ELLEN.

Would God you might see hers!

WEILENBERG.

Shouldst thou not wish me humbled?

ELLEN.

Not by her.

WEILENBERG.

By him through her. The worst, if others did it,
Were light to what she does—therefore through her.

ELLEN.

She has not done it.

WEILENBERG.

Then she should have done.

But this she shall not do, whatever else;
She shall not nurse me, pity me, forgive me—
Receive me as an outcast home again—
Stand forth for intercession with the Count;
Or chide his servants when they mock and brave me.
I have been thought a man till late to-night:
That traitor was the first who saw my tears—
She works as nature teaches her—it is
For retribution that she plagues me thus—
I killed her mother.

ELLEN.

You believe this kinsman?

I dare not speak my thoughts, since that were sin.
Your child must pray for those who wound to death—
And so will I—May God forgive his treachery!
But still methought your lordship showed distrust?

WEILENBERG.

He is too vile for charity.

ELLEN.

Yet he is

So much less wicked than this daughter is,
That you believe in him?

WEILENBERG.

I am constrained

To trust the aptitude of what he says,
Not him. The gates might stand unwatched—they might
By possibility at such a time—
But who forewarned the Count to find them so?
His entrance was no venture unprepared—
He did not come till looked for.

ELLEN.

What—by her?

Her mother's burial chosen for a fraud!
 A night to break her vows in! To betray
 Her promise then! The accuser knows 'tis false.
 Give me that cup—I ask it on my knees—
 For her sake who was blameless!

WEILENBERG.

Get thee hence!

I thought thee wiser.

ELLEN.

Wait till Philip come!

WEILENBERG.

What art thou muttering of—"forbear!—be patient!"
 Go, sleep these dreams away, and cease to tremble:
 What is that cup to thee?—Behold, I fright thee!

ELLEN.

Almost to death! Have pity!

WEILENBERG.

Leave me, then.

ELLEN.

If I may cast the poison from that cup,
 Or take it hence, I will.

WEILENBERG.

If thou do either

I never will forgive thee—when it goes
 My curse goes with it. What afflicts thee thus?

ELLEN.

Because you change so soon from gentleness.

WEILENBERG.

Did I not tell thee so? Dost credit now?

I said that I was cruel to the kind.

The mother taught it to her child, and she,
 Who would have loved me, could not.

ELLEN.

Yet I know

Her mother trusted to her love.

WEILENBERG.

I would trust too!

It was my latest promise to them both!

Thou pitiest her—I that have watched her sleep
 To earn the kiss she woke with—that still hear

Her little questions,—how the flowers have thriven
 She planted yesterday, and when to feed
 The birds she tamed and nourished—dost believe
 I leave her carelessly or love her less?
 I will retract injurious thoughts:—it is
 The cruel who makes the unfaithful. Thou wilt see her—
 Say that I asked, not that I sent, forgiveness:
 Carry my blessing with thee—let her think
 That needful grief has shamed and done me good.

ELLEN.

The wretch belies her!

WEILENBERG.

Hush, child! what is this?

(Music is heard from the chapel.)

ELLEN.

The midnight service for the dead begins—
 I pray let both partake in it.

WEILENBERG.

Ay—here.

Its chaunt will reach me where I am. Wouldst teach
 To creep before the altar from these knaves—
 Seek refuge in the sanctuary?

ELLEN.

Why not?

WEILENBERG.

The murderer would be found beside his work—
 The dead lies there. Go thou, and pray for both.

ELLEN.

I dare not leave the cup—have patience with me—
 O father!—father of that wretch, forbear!

WEILENBERG.

The drink is not my choice: 'twas sent, not asked for.
 Who gives it, will afford none else but shame:
 Shame first, and shortly both—a shameful death.
 Away! I will not touch it till he come.
 Behold, so far is promised thee. *(Exit Ellen.)* Poor child!
 The best-beloved, because so like our own!
 This gentle creature is unhappy too;
 Our pride it is which makes our hearts so hard.
 I might have learnt to pity from the meek;
 Grief has been daily near enough! This chaunt,
 It wearies me; I have not slept of late. *[Weilenberg sleeps.]*

Enter Ellen.

ELLEN.

I am not needed, and I dare not stay.
 Asleep? or is this death? he has drunk, then!

[*She raises her veil.*]

My father has deceived me!—yet he breathes!
 The cup seems still untasted. Change his heart,
 And O, be gracious, Thou that pitiest all!
 Now may I take it hence.

[*She removes, and then replaces the cup.*]

His curse goes with it.

Alas, his wrath pursues me if I do!
 He never will forgive me! yet to leave it!
 His curse, he said, goes with it! So to die!—
 Die cursed! I dare not take it hence! faint, sick!
 The table reels, or else my sight deceives me.

(*Ellen supports herself by leaning against the chair of her father, and sleeps. While the Priory clock loudly strikes twelve, the chaunt gradually dies away into music and voices more aërial.*)

Yield to sleep—for sleep ye must—

Neither counts that bell again.

Earth to earth, and dust to dust—

The spirit takes its flight from pain.

Three called, and one called thrice!—Prayer well has striven—
 Dread penitence at last prevailed.

Come both with us—approved, beloved, forgiven—

Tear-cleansed Remorse, and Faith unveiled.

(*The music is interrupted by loud knocking and voices—the Prioress enters—Weilenberg and Ellen start from sleep—her veil drops.*)

WEILENBERG.

O, tarry yet a moment!—bring them back!—
 Escaped!—art with us here?—they all were here!

ELLEN.

My mother, help me!

WEILENBERG.

Child, we will go too.

PRIORESS to *Ellen*.

What now? Ah, fie upon thee!—hush—thine oath!

WEILENBERG.

I heard my daughter's voice—she called her mother.

PRIORESS.

Ay, my good lord, they always call me so.

What ails thee, babbler? this way—by the grate.

[*Pushes Ellen out.*]

WEILENBERG.

My daughter stood unveiled—the rest around her!

PRIORESS.

We lack the time to speak of visions now.
I pray take refuge till we see who knocks!

WEILENBERG.

No matter who it is—he cannot harm us.
They all were here! I heard my daughter's cry—
She stood beside me, and took hence the cup:
I saw her tears.

PRIORESS.

It is that kinsman's voice.

WEILENBERG.

Then open to him—let him in. A dream! [*Exit Prioress.*]
It was no dream, (*he sees the cup*) and yet the cup stands here!

Enter Rudestein and Barbara.

RUDESTEIN.

Wilt fight or hide?—this Count is at our heels.
Then buckle well the cloak about thy neck—
Beware the river's fog, and catching cold!
Late as it is, my cousin may sup at home.
Nay, do thy message, simple one—come in!

[*He drags Barbara forward.*]

What will avail this hanging of the head?
My lady portress should have shut the gate—
Kept the Count out!

BARBARA.

If he deceived us all,
Was the fault mine?—Am I as old as Ursula?

RUDESTEIN.

But who deceived the seneschal? Speak truth!
My cousin's waiting maid beseeches grace:
I met her where I landed from the boat,
Augmenting Rhine with tears. Her mistress sends her
Before the Count.

WEILENBERG.

What dost thou bring me from her?

BARBARA.

She prays remission, if she did amiss—
For her your lordship's love, and for the Count
More charitable thoughts than those of late—
Release from blame for both. But first she asks
That what is ill may not be cried abroad;

WEILENBERG.
My daughter !

PRIORESS.

Poisoned ! how ?

ELLEN.

Father, I am not faithless—love me still !
You prayed to see me once again—I knew
No way but this. Ask Philip what I swore—
The altar and the grave were witnesses :
I did not dare to draw that veil aside.
All night I have been with thee.

COUNT.

Poison ! whence ?

ELLEN.

The same you sent my father.

COUNT.

Poison ! I !

ELLEN.

Let there be peace—I am no hindrance now.

COUNT.

Who brought it hither ?

RUDESTEIN.

I did, sir—I brought it ;
But warned my cousin that it came from you :
Constrained I brought it. Help for Rolandseck !

BARBARA.

Help ! rescue ! help !

*(Rudestein draws, and attacks Count Albert, but is thrown
down and disarmed by Hubert.)*

COUNT.

Lay hold upon her too !

PRIORESS to Weilenberg.

My lord, I pray go hence.

PHILIP.

He hears thee not.

His eyes are on that face which fades to death.
I and mine oath have slain her !

PRIORESS.

Look, she smiles !

WEILENBERG.

Speak ! canst not speak to me ?

URSULA.

The dread of shame—

They forced the secret from me.

ELLEN.

Go not hence—
I do not see thee, Ursula; who is this?

COUNT.

Is there no help?—look up.

PRIORESS.

Her sight is lost!

ELLEN.

My father, trust me—that I always loved you.
I am not faithless—Philip, speak for me.

WEILENBERG.

She says she loved me—yet one kiss, my child:
Stand from her—let her die.

URSULA.

Her breast is still:

She breathes no more.

PHILIP.

Look, blood upon his lips!
It floods and chokes him; help me, lest he fall.
Murderer, not thou—stand off! (*to the Count.*) Move farther
back!
He would behold his daughter while he dies: [*Weilenberg dies.*]
His heart is burst.

COUNT.

I shall do one thing well—
Better than better men might dare to do.
Vengeance is justice here, if great enough.

RUDESTAIN.

The lord of Rolandseck defies thee still!
I am myself such now.

COUNT.

The last thou shalt be.
Place fetters on him, Hubert!—bind them both.
This baron has a chamber built on high—
Its windows both one way, with briars beneath them,
Where the rock mingles with the masonry.
They shall lodge there locked in, the casements open.
I will myself be chamberlain to-night,
And walk before this Baron to his bed.
Bear torches, Gregory—let the rest find wood,
And drive the dwellers of the castle out.
Set it on fire!

[*Exeunt Count, Rudestein, Barbara, and attendants.*]

PHILIP.¹

These two shall grieve no more !
The sun will rise on roofless walls to-day !
Terror has overcome me ! Guileless lips
Taught Faith its innocent Fraud—but mine the vow
Stronger than love or death ! Their race is ended !

THE END OF FAITH'S FRAUD.

THE FERRYMAN,
OR
THE TRANSLATED ESCUTCHEON.
A Drama in Five Acts.

CHARACTERS.

COUNT OF ALTHEIM and SCHWANNENFELD.

OTTO JACOB, CHAMBERLAIN and intendant of the Count.

BERTHOLD NETHERSTEIN, a wealthy Miller.

COLON, the Ferryman.

TIMM THOMPSON, ASSISTANT Ferryman.

MARK MENNO, COACHMAN to the Countess, with other Servants.

COUNTESS OF ALTHEIM, widow of *Balthasar*.

RACHEL, widow of the Baron Von Kripperbrock, and now wife of Netherstein.

CATHERINE, her daughter by the late Baron.

Scene on the Danube: a Ferry between Passau and Linz, with a large house and corn mill: the habitable part occupied by Netherstein; the rest consisting of granaries and other similar buildings.

THE FERRYMAN.

ACT I.

A Hall, the walls of which are covered with nets, boat-hooks, eel-spears, dog-couples, saddles, match-locks, morris-spikes, bows, crossbows, stags' horns, and various other implements of war and sport.

NETHERSTEIN and FERRYMAN.

NETHERSTEIN.

The quarter's ferry-rent is paid in labour :
I shall be found a debtor if we square—
Put up thy purse.

FERRYMAN.

We reckon ere we part.

NETHERSTEIN.

I will not touch a thaler. Thou didst hinge
The tallet shutters for me, stale the gaun,
New cauk the cistern, pay the barges wherry,
Find floats and lead-lines for the smallest trammel,
Lift eight score bean-sacks to the windlass hook,
And break the roan-mare's filly. Fare-thee-well !
We might have housed together yet, and I
Have had thee here at hand to see me buried :
But pride confounds us all with lust of greatness !
How couldst thou lift thine eyes so high as Kate ?
That little crescent born of two such orbs ?

The daughter of the man that went before me ?
Last light of Knipperbrock ? If mine she were,
No more than mine, a pullet from some hen
Befitting such a dunghill, thou hadst steered
Thy wherry free of rent, and from my mealsack
Hadst baked thy batch—we had not parted thus.
No sight so comely as a cheerful face ;
Thine never came amiss to me.

FERRYMAN.

It could
Outstare ill-chance before we met, Belthazar—
And shall do so again.

NETHERSTEIN.

Ill-chance may like it,
As sweeter-tempered maids, with Kate, have done,
And change to good, by staring at its staring :
If so, I pray come back again. There is
In all this house but one that loves thee not.

FERRYMAN.

That one has got its cipher hitched behind it—
Scores like a baker's dozen, one to spare—
Is oddly even with us both, good master.
Let us truck honestly, take turns in answering,
And thou begin as ablest. If indeed
All cheerfull faces seem thus pleasant to thee,
How chanced that one which frowns me out of doors
To thrall and overpower thee so ! Pride was it ?
Through lust of greatness that thine eyes endured
To gaze upon the firmament and covet
Nor star nor crescent, but the moon at full ?
Kate is but as a spark from such a beacon.
I crave the daughter of Von Knipperbrock,
Thou hast his wife.

NETHERSTEIN.

Take warning from my beacon !
The moon which ruled our almanac has waned.
At first she shone benignantly above me—
Would make me thrive ! Ambition plucked me on,
While pity pushed me. I too must be great ;
Get arms to quarter with, and not a florin !
So was I overcome.

FERRYMAN.

She brings thee honor,
And thinks upon her promises ?

NETHERSTEIN.

I do,

Being greater than I thought to be, or cared for.
 My house at least is nobler. In a week
 She nailed her husband's shield above my door—
 Her elder husband's scutcheon over head—
 The moon of Knipperbrock :—where once a year
 I paint and gild it to my cost and honor.
 Twelve times it has shone brighter than at first.
 The ghost from whom I had it deals by barter :
 I find his wife and daughter things to eat,
 With all their garniture—and he finds me
 The equivalent in moonshine—Let it blow !

(Storm heard without.)

To wish such storms in harvest is a sin—
 And yet fair weather which will part us twain
 Seems foully out of season. We shall miss
 Thee and thy song ere Christmas pass us, Colen !
 The fire burnt brisker when thy bench stood near ;
 And bed-time ever seemed too soon, though Grace
 Winked and put back the clock.

FERRYMAN.

I may by then

Lack stool and fire—I must such willing listeners.
 The rain falls heavily.

NETHERSTEIN.

None can cross to day.

Thunder ! hush ! peace now !

FERRYMAN.

'Twas but wind.

NETHERSTEIN.

Wouldst know

How chanced my seat upon the crupper thus ?
 That raw-backed hackney, wedlock, shook me there,
 Shifting the pillion foremost. Do thou leave
 A legacy behind to ease our parting.
 Thou hast some witch's wallet, sieve, and shears,
 A twin-child's caul, or such-like. Nothing harms thee :
 Ill-luck is ever near thee, but o'erruled.
 'Twere easier sink a cork. Thou camest among us
 A soldier, with thy calling marked in front ;
 War's own hand-writing scarcely yet effaced—
 Disbanded, pensionless, yet blithe as May.
 Wouldst help the Ferryman, then rent the Ferry :
 Row, run, or ride—no matter what or whither.

The rich man's toll was alms for Lazarus :
Thy bottle and thy wheaten cake were changed
For fasting thanks, and often none at all.

FERRYMAN.

But now thy moon has blasted me.

NETHERSTEIN.

Hissed out,
Like cobbler's cat from next door madam's kitten,
Hard hands are clapped at thee. Thou must be quick,
To save thine ears. Friendless and poor as ever,
Yet sometimes prouder than a Paladine,
And kingly still above distressful thoughts.
Teach me to hold such subjects under me.
Mine have been ruled these three years by thine aid,
But will rebel again when thou art gone.

FERRYMAN.

My crown stood on my head when I was born :
Nature bestowed the sceptre. I have kept them—
By sweeping dust from conscience ere it stick—
Enduring and forgiving—so far stainless.
Peace comes not down from hoppers filled with malice.
Your grist when ground is mainly as your sample :
The finest boulder cannot change the grain :
Yet may we sift and cleanse it. On the stream
I ruled my sail as wisely as I could ;
The wind which blew upon it was from heaven.

NETHERSTEIN.

Lo, here comes Kate ; with tears upon her cheek !
I will not mar thy kisses. *[Exit Netherstein.]*

Enter Catherine.

FERRYMAN.

What has grieved thee ?

CATHERINE.

The dove-cot's weather-vane is blown away.

FERRYMAN.

Who says it is ?

CATHERINE.

Grace Geert, and Minna Been.

FERRYMAN.

And Catherine weeps because it is ? Ah me !
I may not tarry till we find and fix it ;
Being blown away myself.

CATHERINE.

I will not grieve
For that, nor one as fickle—who would shew me
How light a thing it is to say farewell.

FERRYMAN.

Dost speak believingly?

CATHERINE.

I must—what else
Is left me to believe?

FERRYMAN.

Even that I love thee,
And therefore would not profit by thy tears ;
Buy pearls like these with drops no more than water.
Nor traffic in exchange of promises.
Nor mark the vantage ground for leaping back.
Already it is a sin to stand so square
Between thy faith and fortune, gentle Kate—
Thy faith, though perfect in its right to change.
Thou shalt be free as breath from babes asleep:
And I no more a knave than love has made me—
For love will lie to hope, and hire her aid,
With proffers large as possibility.
One year remember me.

CATHERINE.

But one ?

FERRYMAN.

In less

I may be dead or poorer still than now
By all on this side nothing.

CATHERINE.

One, I pledge thee—
To faith and love I promise all the rest.
I am not wise, like Colen, nor could fix
The time when love has leave to change or cease—
License forgetfulness on this day twelvemonths :
Nor will release him while I live, nor after.
Think me a child or fool,—for so I am—
Deride, but love me.

FERRYMAN.

Thou art truly wise ;
For truth is wisdom : yet a child in heart.
I have lived longer by ten years.

CATHERINE.

And learnt

That love may change ?

FERRYMAN.

Ay. truly—to my cost ;

And haply to my profit also, Catherine.

It may, or else I had not loved thee now.

Twice we may love, at least, with space between.

CATHERINE.

How much of it ?

FERRYMAN.

Apprenticeship to grief :

Seven years for constancy. I thought as thou

At brave eighteen—and thou at eight-and-twenty

Mayst think as I do.

CATHERINE.

Thou canst love, not trust !

I can do both, and ask no recompense,

But love enough to wait till faith may earn it.

It is my peace to know that thou art good.

I would not hear this seven years' grief.

FERRYMAN.

Nay, three

Were short and merry too, since I came hither

In search of such chance bread as soldiers eat,

When strife affords them none. My road was all ways.

My riches not too heavy for my back.

This roomy world sufficed for choice of dwellings.

I helped a feebler Ferryman at first—

And so got anchorage here. How love has thriven

We better know than when he first began.

At last he turns me out. There is no hope

The while I bide, nor peace till I am gone.

To see and hear thee baited for my sake,

Is it worse than absence will be.

CATHERINE.

Tarry a week.

FERRYMAN.

By days and weeks I tarry months too long.

The same that takes mine office, brings his boat

And steers me back his passenger.

CATHERINE.

To-day ?

Dost think that he will come for thee to-day ?

FERRYMAN.

The wind is with him, but too much by half—
Go hence he cannot till it change. There is
Enough time left in which to beg a keepsake.

CATHERINE.

What shall I give ?

FERRYMAN.

A ringlet from those temples.

CATHERINE.

By the year's end it will escape thy keeping :
Be dropped a hair a day—so waste to nothing,
And leave me ill-remembered. Thou shalt take
What hitherto has lain so near my heart,
That if truth faltered, or love were not honest,
I had not dared to keep it there. It is
Faith's holiest symbol. (*gives a cross.*)

FERRYMAN.

Nay, a tress instead :

I have no gold to change with thee.

CATHERINE.

I see

A ring by much too small for such a hand.

FERRYMAN.

Such baubles shame their bearers. I have thought
To cast it where the Danube runs the deepest :
But still have worn it—more in scorn than favor—
The sign of faith perverted.

CATHERINE.

Let me have it—

I will restore it to its grace again.

(*While she struggles for the ring, enter Rachel Von Knipperbrock.*)

RACHEL.

What talk was that of grace and modesty ?
Let me be profited ! They say that blushes
Are maiden warranties for both of them.
Your servant, gracious mistress ! Paw with paupers !
Thou couldst do this without a blush—art blushing
That it was seen in doing ? Signs of grace
Which show themselves so late are after welcome.
I kiss your hands—good-morrow—with my courtesy !—
What wouldst thou have, knave, here ?

FERRYMAN.

A blessing, mother-in-law.

RACHEL.

Hussy, be gone. (*Exit Catherine.*)

FERRYMAN.

She weeps.

RACHEL.

Thou shalt weep too,
Behind the whipping post, with greater reason.
He claims thee from me, as his son-in-law,
By many ancient marks upon thy back :
And he shall have thee, presently.

FERRYMAN.

Sit down.

By Saint Bride's hose, I will not budge a rood
Without my stipulations—nor shalt thou.
There must be treaties with me ere I go—
Sit on thy throne, Semiramis.

RACHEL.

Ah ! what ?

Semiramis ! stand off ! wouldst murder me !
Out with him to the river, Melchior Tauss !
Call me a dog ? Sirrah, let go ! art drunk ?

FERRYMAN.

There shall be contracts sworn to by your highness.
A league I will make with you. Twixt us twain
Affiance there shall be and lasting love.
Woe ! woe ! befall the breach of it !

RACHEL.

Love thee !

Ah ! hound's face ! Clubs, Belthazar Netherstein—
House ! help ! bring clubs, for pity sake ! run ! run !
Out, Satan ! what wouldst have of me ? art mad ?

FERRYMAN.

The wind outroars thee—none can help or hear thee.
These gusty water-splashes choke thy piping.
Therefore sit down and harken to me.

RACHEL.

Well—

Let loose ! thou wouldst not harm me ? what dost crave ?

FERRYMAN.

A peaceful covenant. These thirty moons

I have paid tax and toll to please your highness :
Now must I quit.

RACHEL.

So, get thee gone—good-bye !
All peace go with thee !

FERRYMAN.

Some of it, I hope :
I would leave some behind me. There remains
A prisoner in thy wardenship. One hand
She gives to each of us. If I forego,
Thou shalt forbear ?

RACHEL.

I shall ? who says I shall ?
I purposed this, indeed, without constraint ;
But who shall bind me ?

FERRYMAN.

I, the ferryman—
By mightiest adjurations—all things good—
And all things evil ! By thine hopes while here,
Thine health hereafter. By this watery world
Of stranded barges, causeways, mill-fleams, ferries ;
And that serener change which is to come.
By all the lore of faith and courtesy—
Love, honor, gentle breeding, what thou art,
And hast been heretofore of fair and noble,
Ere purest meal was intermixed with bran.
By every knightly knee which pressed the stones
Beneath the lattice of thy maiden chamber—
The minstrel's attestation—herald's oath—
Thy daughter's blood—her father's chivalry—
The moon eclipsed of ancient Knipperbrock—
Remorse, compassion, magnanimity,—
Thy troth, thy womanhood—

RACHEL.

Stop ! stop ! good sooth
This charm has put me out of breath—swear what ?

FERRYMAN.

To keep within the confines of thy state,
And rule with sovereign potency, not terror.
Thou shalt not break nor bruise—thou shalt not stretch
The sceptre, as a rod, against thy child—
Spit proverbs at her, twist thy lips awry,
And vex her soul with scorn of Ferrymen.
This thou shalt swear to me.

RACHEL.

If I do not ?

What power hast thou above me ?

FERRYMAN.

Be advised,

Thou widowed Dian ! look ! I give thee time—
Hast answered that thou wilt not ?

RACHEL.

Ay—I have.

FERRYMAN.

We dwell together, then : my boat moors here—
Thou hast absolved me of my promises.
Henceforth my habitation is provided.
I will be nearer than I yet have been.

RACHEL.

Nearer to whom ?—to me ?—

FERRYMAN.

The while I live,

And peradventure after if I can.

At morn my face shall meet thee on the stairs—
At night its tears shall wake thee from thy pillow—
Within the hall at meat, the pew at prayer ;
At home, at church, at market, fronting, following,
'Twixt forsail and the gib upon the river—
And in the waggon 'twixt the tilt and thrippl—
Lock fast the closet door 'gainst Minna Been,
But still amongst the bottles—look to find it.

RACHEL.

More likely than at church. I scorn thy face—
I do abhor thy face—alive or dead
I fain would rid the house of it.

FERRYMAN.

Thou mayest.

RACHEL.

How, Beelzebub ? what wouldst thou ?

FERRYMAN.

What I say.

RACHEL.

Wilt keep it out of sight if I do promise ?
My sight and daughter's sight ?

FERRYMAN.

Thou shalt not see it

Till thou desire it.

RACHEL.

Get thee gone, at once.
This covenant will last a thousand years.
Take thy face hence, then.

FERRYMAN.

Are we sworn ? The faith
Of Knipperbrock is pledged to me ? Henceforth
Thou shalt use gentleness ? If either fail
The other is free ?

RACHEL.

So—hang thyself—I promise.
But, prithee, choose a gallows out of sight—
Even there I would not see thy face—or seeing
Desire to change its bidding place. How now ?
What thing is this ?

(Enter Netherstein with Mark Menno.)

NETHERSTEIN.

A tail which takes precedence.
A trumpet from the puppet show—a courier,
To Punch, I hope. Abase that feather, sir.
Down cap and all its plumery—off with it !
Let the comb under cool awhile. Behold
The widow of Von Knipperbrock—my Lady !
Who doth rule all things here beneath the moon .
This other is the Ferryman as yet :
He knows his craft—ask him.

FERRYMAN.

Prithee, make haste !
My right of office hangs upon the air—
Long questions might survive it. What wouldst have ?

MARK MENNO.

A cup of wine, a corner near the fire,
And what, by chance, may come to light hereafter
When the pot's lid is lifted. These for me.
My mistress craves a passage 'cross the ferry—
Some farther hope of drowning.

FERRYMAN.

Thou shalt take
My cup, my corner, and my chance at dinner :
Thy lady goes with me.

MENNO.

She will do so.

A benediction on thy love ! I change,
For three good things, but one.

FERRYMAN.

All these are gratis—

Thrown into boot.

NETHERSTEIN.

He yields thee meal for gurgeons—
My mistress for thy mistress. Bless the light
Which shines above thee, and look up !

MENNO.

It seems

A larded yarn-wick matched against a star,
The brightest of the firmament. No matter ;—
I take it for its uses nevertheless.
A candle is as handy as a comet.
So stir thyself, good mistress.

RACHEL.

Thou wilt eat

No dinner here to day—and if elsewhere
It will be after supper time, good master.

NETHERSTEIN.

Thy lips have closed the passage to thy belly.

MENNO.

I did but speak by figures.

FERRYMAN.

Thou hast made

Thy reckoning wrong, and cast the sum against thee.
What star is this which can out-shine our moon ?
Her name and thine ?

MENNO.

Aquarius, sir, am I,

Your water-sodden servant. Here she is.

(Pointing to the window.)

Jove's brightest daughter answers thee herself.
Wilt launch the ferry-boat ?

RACHEL.

Whose daughter is she ?

Horsemen before the coach, and more behind !

(Looking out.)

Who is she, did he say ?

NETHERSTEIN.

Whoe'er she be,

She needs must tarry here till heaven grow milder.

In faith, a brave attendance !

RACHEL.

Speak, for pity !

Who is she, good Aquarius ?

MENNO.

Here comes help

To pluck thy red-hot moon from off the wall,
And quench it in the Danube, by-and-bye.
I called for drink.

FERRYMAN.

The rain has blinded thee.

Canst not discern a scutcheon from a sign ?

NETHERSTEIN.

A castle, from a change house ?

FERRYMAN.

Such a lady,

From Hostess Joan ?

NETHERSTEIN.

Or such a lord as I

From tapster, chamberlain ?—set wide thine eyes.

MENNO.

Is it so indeed ?

RACHEL.

Thou shalt have what thou wilt—

Who is she ? tell me who she is ? quick ! quick !

MENNO.

The Countess Altheim, Lambach, Schwannstadt—

RACHEL.

Call Catherine hither. Where is Minna Been ?

A Countess ?

MENNO.

And an heiress—while a maid

The Baroness Rabensberg.

RACHEL.

The Count come with her ?

Bring me my hood and mantle—run upstairs !

MENNO.

He comes from Rabensberg, and she from Reid.
They meet upon the Danube by consent.

RACHEL.

He comes to meet her here ?

MENNO.

And take her on.

His kinsman Otho Jucold brings her hither.
 Our readiest road was that which runs by Linz—
 But there the pest is. Passau lies too high.
 The last night's reckoning should have made us earlier :
 Who may confront such blasts !

RACHEL.

Grace, what dost stare at ?

Light fires in both the chambers, magpie—quick !
 Bid Thwart prepare to serve with Melchior Tauss.
 Hast eels or fish, Belthazar Netherstein ?

NETHERSTEIN.

Two krales of fish, and eels in all the putcheons.

GRACE.

A leveret pasty ?

PRUDENCE.

Plovers stuffed with sage ?

MINNA.

A forest chine for baking ?

GRACE.

We have quales ?

PRUDENCE.

The largest copper ?

RACHEL.

Puppet, light the furnace.

The Baroness Rabensberg ? and how long married ?

(Enter Catherine.)

Walk thou with me, child, but forbear to speak.

MENNO.

The compact is exceeded—we must mend it
 By notes upon the margin—codicils—
 Or hear no more from me.

RACHEL.

Storch, heat the oven :

Now where is Bernard Brann to flay the coneys ?
 Give me thine arm, child ; I must seem to lean.
 This Colen might befriend us now—What ails him ?
 That dog's face is abashed at last ! Stop, sirrah !
 What dost thou run away for thus ?

FERRYMAN.

To hide it. [Exeunt.]

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

The Mill House.

An inner apartment, with hangings of needlework.

COUNTESS and OTHO JUCOLD.

COUNTESS.

What hope of better weather?

OTHO.

None to-night:
The wind blows spitefully and full this way.

COUNTESS.

We must rest here, then.

OTHO.

He who looks abroad
Need use his hands to keep his feet the steadier,
And hold by what seems fixed or least disturbed.

COUNTESS.

Canst see across the Danube?

OTHO.

'Twixt the blasts,
And when the rain forbears to pelt and blind us,
The boat is seen, but nothing else we wait for.
All breathing life seeks shelter. Half-drowned trees
Mark where the river's margin used to be.
Some yield both leaves and branches to the wind,
And purchase safety for their lightened trunks
With what the imperious tempest robs them of.
Others float by with all their green boughs round them,
As wearied of the struggle and subdued—
Like wrestlers fallen.

COUNTESS.

Dost know what time it is?

R

OTHO.

An hour to sunset.

COUNTESS.

Are the servants cared for?

OTHO.

They and their horses largely. Were it calm,
We scarce could cross to-night.

COUNTESS.

You will not cross
To-morrow nor the next day—so adieu !
I shall wait here for better guidance hence.
Your charge is ended, sir.

OTHO.

Return—what now ?
In such a night as this go back again ?

COUNTESS.

Go when you please, or where, if not with me.

OTHO.

My lord expects to find me here. He will
Distrust the haste which could not wait his coming.

COUNTESS.

And if he do, he will at last think justly.
I can interpret for thee. It were well
Such knowledge found his ears without thy presence :
And wise in thee to teach by deputy.
Art studious lest thy kinsman should mistake ?
Both he and I have done so. We have thought—
Like those who find divinity in fools—
That something good might bless the dreaming spirit
With safer revelations now and then—
Visions of holier promise—that the flowers
So gaudily embroidered on thy brain,
Had honor for their foil, and truth behind them.
Henceforth I shall loath such for seeming thus,
And scorn myself for trusting them.

OTHO.

It was
The grace of such fair thoughts that dazzled me !
Trust in my temperance made me drunk ! I reel,
But not away from honor.

COUNTESS.

Honor was it,
Which whispered foully of adulterous hope ?

Sighed to supplant a benefactor? Nay,
The ear of baseness tingles not, or else
I might have blushed to say how largely so.

OTHO.

I never had a hope which wrought his peace.

COUNTESS.

Then what you told to me, tell him:—why not?
Make the profession face to face, if true.
While I stand by, begin your history—
Say that you love his wife—have told her so—
Being careful for the honor of us both.
Or else, shall I say this?

OTHO.

If so, say all:

Tell him the sort of love as well. Perchance
He may remember how his own began,
And start the less at mine.

COUNTESS.

His own? Was his

Unmatched with his condition—conscience crossed?
What sacred laws did his break?

OTHO.

I have heard

That some it did; and those, in part, the same.
Conscience, being largely fed, kept out of hearing.

COUNTESS.

What hast thou heard, knave?

OTHO.

This is tyranny!

I suffer if I answer or forbear.

COUNTESS.

Wouldst half unwrap a falsehood—then retract
And cover it up again? Speak out! heard what?

OTHO.

That friendship, like an image made of wax,
Dissolves before love's heat and disappears.
My lord was neither free himself to love,
Nor loved the free.

COUNTESS.

Hast followed tales like these

The road to baseness? run so fast with hearsay?
Harnessed thine honor to a lie? The Count
Could know but what I taught him of my freedom:
Have I misled thee too? Believing this,

R 2

How then? What share in it hast thou? love thee!
 Why, sick imagination's gorge is strained
 Conceiving its own argument. Thrust faith
 With all that awes or hinders out of sight;
 Or changing, not confounding, our estate—
 A flax-girl I—and thou a nobleman—
 Presuming any change but that of will—
 Dost think thy hopes were nearer?

OTHO.

I have none.

We gaze upon the heavens, content without them.
 Is love like this an injury?

COUNTESS.

Ay is it!

A loathsome one is any kind from thee.
 The purest possible a gutter's vapour.
 I pray thee take thine incense to the kitchen.
 Look for some idol with a fire before it;
 And suit the goddess to the worshipper.
 Why shouldst thou gaze upon the heavens? Be gone—
 Send me this lady's steward.—O here he is!

(Exit Otho. Enter Netherstein.)

COUNTESS.

Thy message from the winds is not a kind one:
 I thank thee nevertheless. They will not hear us?
 We may not cross to-day?

NETHERSTEIN.

The drift scuds faster,
 And Danube rises, though the tempest lulls.
 These are not bated yet. Were I a traveller,
 I should prefer rough fare, with honest lodging,
 To darkness in a night like that before us—
 Even if there were no river.

COUNTESS.

So should I
 With power to choose 'twixt roadside-fare indeed,
 And the dark road. Our haste to get away
 Is quickened by the pain we cause in tarrying:
 We press too heavily here. Superfluous kindness
 Expels us while it holds us. I must quit,
 At risk of missing him who comes to meet me.
 O, that thy mistress were but half so good!

NETHERSTEIN.

Double her goodness scarce would seem too much.

No fear lest patience fail me that way tested.
My portion of the cherry, as it is,
Is but the stone.

COUNTESS.

Hush ! hush !—Couldst not befriend me ?
Suggest that ease is fevered by excess ?
Raise banks about her hospitality
Which overflows and drowns me ?

NETHERSTEIN.

Such a prayer
Would light amongst the poultry like the pip :
Slay all, and haply reach to larger matters.
She would not bate a feather. Let her be ;
Or strive to eat her up.

COUNTESS.

At any time
Our presence were a burden here : but now,
So new a widow troubled with such guests !
Her daughter's eyes are filled with tears. I see
A hatchment o'er the gate.

NETHERSTEIN.

Her father's scutcheon.

COUNTESS.

An orphan like myself when younger still !

NETHERSTEIN.

Nay, she is old enough to let him slip ;
She weeps not for her father—has forgotten him.
His widow never will forget the while
The moon endureth—nor let me forget him.
I fain would shake this father by the hand
Alive and in his place again.

COUNTESS.

There is
Too bright a hue upon her cheek for sorrow's—
Else might the angel Pity call her sister.
Whom shall we trust if she too is forgetful ?
Her mother spoke of some unworthy choice :
Would call a stranger in to arbitrate !
Asks aid of me ! thinks fancy may be quenched
By hints which casual kindness throws upon it !
Heart-counsel from the ignorant passer-by !
A worthy lady, but of strange conclusions !
What can I do ?

NETHERSTEIN.

She thinks that one so great

Can do and undo harder things than this.
 Were she a countess she would stop the wind,
 Or blow it back again. The girl is good :
 An honest man the one she thinks about.

COUNTESS.

Of what estate ?

NETHERSTEIN.

He was the Ferryman.

COUNTESS.

A ferryman ! and she of gentle blood !
 This swift oblivion of her father's death,
 With such a love succeeding !

NETHERSTEIN.

Fifteen years
 Suffice for grief : he died when she was three.
 At holy-rood she counts eighteen.

COUNTESS.

What sayest ?

NETHERSTEIN.

His heiress has succeeded to his shield,
 With nothing else, these fifteen years :—her sighs
 Are not for him.

COUNTESS.

A hatchment o'er the gate
 For fifteen years ?

NETHERSTEIN.

It has hung there but twelve.
 These twelve seem long enough, and many enough,
 To him whose gate it is—her second husband.
 The first had none to hang it on.

COUNTESS.

A second ?

NETHERSTEIN.

She has had, and she still has, two. The first
 Her ghostly man of honour, Knipperbrock,
 Whose scutcheon shines above the other's door—
 A spectral champion kept to talk about—
 O'er-awes and shames his fleshly counterpart.

COUNTESS.

What is this last, and where ?

NETHERSTEIN.

A married miller ;
 Lord of the ferry here. He is on earth

The duplicate of Knipperbrock above :
Takes toll and tribute with both hands. So much
For what he is—Belthazar Netherstein :
The other part, the where he is, is answered,
For here he is.

COUNTESS.

Her husband ?

NETHERSTEIN.

Bodily :

In temporal things.

COUNTESS.

Didst thou not say her servant ?

NETHERSTEIN.

Ay, so I am, indeed—the twain in one ;
First servant, second husband—minor domo.
My lady might prevail to do me good.
The man defunct has had a twelve-year's preference :
It is my turn to head the partnership.
I would have this made known without offence ;
And henceforth take priority.

Enter Catherine.

Come hither—

The child and I have what this sprite has left us.
Speak wisely, mouse!

[Exit Netherstein.]

COUNTESS.

Bear with me yet a little ;

I am not thankless for my welcome here :
But scarcely less bewildered than the sot
Who slept a clown, and woke an emperor.
This lady is thy mother ?

CATHERINE.

Yes.

COUNTESS.

And noble ?

CATHERINE.

My father was.

COUNTESS.

I never will distrust

What nature writes upon a page so fair ;
Nor ask if eyes like those could look toward folly.
Let us be friends at once—date sisterhood
Neither by months nor years, but her suggestion.
Away with blushes, then. There is a task

So pinned to my consent by many prayers,
Girt on by gratitude, that doing it,
Or leaving it undone, I should blush too.
Might we not ease each other? There must be
Some witchcraft here.

CATHERINE.

If so, my lady brought it.

COUNTESS.

I came since noon, and am already suborned
To interpose with spells against love's wiles,
And wedlock's injuries! A stranger spurred
By adjurations leaps where friends walk trembling!
Would we were such, indeed!

CATHERINE.

I should wish so
If both were humbler, or myself the greatest:
Now all I ask is clearance from ill thoughts
Suggested to my shame.

COUNTESS.

Well answered, maid!
If something proudly too, why, perhaps the better.
What right have I where love has locked his pearls?
At least forgive me.

CATHERINE.

Think me that I am—
Indeed a child, ill-taught and ignorant;
But neither proud nor thankless. Shame it is
Which burns at last against unjust abasement.
My lady blushed for me: a stranger hears
Of that which, when it prospers, hides itself—
Is bashful at the best; though praised and happy
Creeps out of sight: but here is cried abroad,
With fie upon it, in the ears of greatness;
And told to beggars as they pass the door.
Why did my lady speak so heedfully,
But that she thought the thing she spoke of shameful?

COUNTESS.

I thought love's choice unworthy, not love's self.

CATHERINE.

Now Heaven forgive me, for I will speak proudly!
If there be truth in those who lived before us,
The fair and noble did not think so once.

COUNTESS.

What thought they not?

CATHERINE.

That gentleness is baseness,
The brave unworthy.

COUNTESS.

Ah, since Love could talk,
He lisped his eloquence with infant lip,
And ever reasoned thus 'gainst fortune's crosses !
His second childhood babbles like his first.
Let us pluck off the roses from his pate,
And see how bald it is. Why, every shepherd
Seems bright as Mercury to the maid who loves him.
These May-day garlands fit ten thousand wearers.
My gentle hostess, scorn such worshipry !
A holier altar is there for our prayers,
Than this of love : and if we would do well,
We must present a costlier sacrifice.

CATHERINE.

What sacrifice ?

COUNTESS.

Both what appears to be,
And sometimes too what is our happiness.

CATHERINE.

But wherefore should we ?

COUNTESS.

Our own hearts constrain us.
By such a tenure do we hold our state :
On this condition is it ours. We turn
And leave the chase of butterflies to babes.
If nobly born, thou hast no choice of baseness.

CATHERINE.

I do not choose it when I love the noble.

COUNTESS.

A ferryman ?

CATHERINE.

Were I a Countess too,
I should not blush at all—being proud to love him.

Enter Netherstein.

NETHERSTEIN.

There is, at last, a running to and fro
'Twixt boat and burrow on the farther side :
Such signs of speech as deaf men hearken at—
Uplifted hands and bonnets.

COUNTESS.

Then he comes.

NETHERSTEIN.

The wind blows trumpet-like. They cannot cross!
We scarce dare trust the covert whence we peep,
Such gusts and angry eddies howl against it.
Tiles drop even here, though looking leewardly,
With all the house between.

Enter Otho.

OTHO.

They hoist a pennon.

COUNTESS.

The Count's?

OTHO.

We cannot see its blazonry;
The streamer points this way.

COUNTESS.

Then what dost judge by?

OTHO.

Their numbers, and the plumes upon their caps.

COUNTESS.

But can they cross the river, sir, or no?

OTHO.

The wind is with them.

COUNTESS.

Call the ferryman:

His practice may instruct us what to hope.
Let the rest watch again.

Exeunt Netherstein and Otho. Enter Tycho Thollpinne.

COUNTESS.

So! who is this?

TYCHO.

My lady's ferryman.

COUNTESS.

Shame on thee, Cupid!
To drown a Triton! Breathe, and dry thy tears.
What is it that afflicts thee thus? Alas,
His sorrows choke him! Can my lord come hither?

TYCHO.

In time he may—when the wind falls he will.
I care not if he tarry there till Christmas.
Let him go back again, or bide my crossing.

(Cries without.)

The boat is off.

TYCHO.

A good deliverance then !

COUNTESS.

Dost doubt it, Patch ? This nature's nobleman !

CATHERINE.

Who ? Thollpinne ? This is Tycho !

COUNTESS.

And what is he ?

CATHERINE.

He helps the ferryman.

TYCHO.

I did my best

With larboard oar these three years past in June.
But now I cannot help him.

CATHERINE.

What has chanced ?

TYCHO.

His wits have slipped the painter—drifted off.
Past help he is.

COUNTESS.

Then, prithee, let him rest.

TYCHO.

The Count ? I will do so.

COUNTESS.

The ferryman.

CATHERINE.

What dost thou grieve for ?

TYCHO.

None in twenty leagues

Could pull a wherry with him up the stream ;
Nor break a random colt in thrice the time.
He rode Schweile's brimstone gelding 'cross the Danube
Stark naked like a babe. In twelve-score yards,
Outran Stark's warrener by half a pole ;
And gave the flying tailor what he asked.
Punt lost five bouts in six at single stick :
Shadrach and Melchior with the mergenstern.
He fixed the weathercock for Abraham Screech ;
And carried Taus's load with him astride it.
If Gregory brags he lies—I saw Giles under.
The angel of the house he was !

CATHERINE.

Where is he ?

COUNTESS.

What has befallen him, sirrah ?

TYCHO.

Beseech your grace

To speak on his behalf !

COUNTESS.

To whom ?

TYCHO.

Her mother.

COUNTESS.

A three-fold mediation ! What about ?

TYCHO.

Let him be married—he has lost his wits,
Who was the stay of all awhile ago !
His face is crusted like a calves-head pasty.
One might make fritters from his cheeks—they shine
Like morris-men's at Whitsuntide. Behold,
His father could not know him !

(*Enter Mark Menno, leading in the Ferryman disguised with
meal on his face.*)

MARK MENNO.

Now—your curtesy—

We look for country breeding, but beware !

My lady will speak first.

COUNTESS.

A mask to-day ?

Why, this is changing Tycho for a fool !
Small brains for none at all ! Is he the right one ?
Thou natural nobleman, art drunk or crazed ?
Canst answer what I ask thee ?

FERRYMAN.

Let me hear it.

My lady must not always trust outsiders.

COUNTESS.

She must not always ; then she does sometimes ?
Why mask where known ?

FERRYMAN.

Ask thou thy mother, Kate.

It is a contract sworn to whilst I tarry.
I keep my footing here by such a pact ;
And thou thine ears.

COUNTESS.

Canst see the ferry-boat ?

FERRYMAN.

The while it swims, I can.

COUNTESS.

Dost doubt its swimming?

FERRYMAN.

Not if they miss the shoals, and keep her free. [Going.
I will return again.

COUNTESS.

I pray stay here ;

Let these look out, and tell us what befalls.
How keep her free again?

FERRYMAN.

Their craft swims deep—

Her gunwale nothing with the wind abeam ;
Yet must they hoist a rag or two for clearance.
She makes but little way, howe'er it blow.

NETHERSTEIN *calls*.

They near us, boy.

FERRYMAN.

But can they stem the current,
And keep her quarter to the wind?

OTHO *calls*.

The Count !

I see their liveries. They are past half way.

FERRYMAN.

Come to the wool-room casement, Netherstein.

COUNTESS.

Stay thou by me.

TYCHO.

Seek counsel from a fool?

FERRYMAN.

I may be nearer than I thought I was ;
Like many a counsellor who doubts not yet.
The senses or the brains are leaky somewhere.

TYCHO.

I told my lady so.

FERRYMAN.

When heaven is mildest
No tongue can send its meaning half across.
In such a day as this, the lip and ear
Need touch, and do their best for one another.
Yet did I hear my name, with cries for aid,
Far off, and mingling with the blast it rode on—

Shrill as the tempest's wailing—help ! help ! help !
Even thrice I heard it.

COUNTESS.
How long since ?

FERRYMAN.
An hour—

It may be less than one. If all the bones
The Danube buries from us, lived again—
And every mouth were hallooing through the storm,
I had not heard, or hearing, understood them.
That cry I did hear nevertheless.

NETHERSTEIN *calls*.
They come !

All hands are baling her : the boat swims low.

COUNTESS.
How many canst see ?

NETHERSTEIN.
Why, ten or twelve.

FERRYMAN.
Close-reefed ?

NETHERSTEIN *calls*.
A quarter of the foresail—yet too much.

TYCHO.
The shoals have shifted place since yesterday.
Fresh banks and drifting trees are everywhere.
A duck would wait at home for better weather.

NETHERSTEIN *calls*.
The scullery-casement looks upon them now :
This way, Sir Otho. Stop ! she strikes—hold ! hold !
Twice struck ! her mast and tackle overboard !
Fast ! she is fast ! they cannot help themselves !
No—now she swims again.

COUNTESS.
Where is this casement ?

FERRYMAN.
Stay near her, Kate—and do not let her go. [Exit.

Enter Rachel.

RACHEL.
Is it the Count, child ? Sirrah, what art doing ? [To Tycho.

Make haste, and take the boat to him.

TYCHO.

Canst tell
The readiest way, and how to get her there ?
Wouldst run aground for love of company ?
Then let us go together, Mistress Moon. (*Exit Tycho.*)

NETHERSTEIN *calls.*

They tail to leeward, right upon a shoal !
O, help ! they ground again !

RACHEL.

Count Altheim lost !

Why, where is Colen ?

COUNTESS.

Call the Ferryman.

Enter Otho.

OTHO.

Less than an arrow's flight from twenty friends,
Two nobles perish !

Enter Tycho.

TYCHO.

Wherefore mouth the wind ?
Better to drown in peace, than burst with bawling.
What use of waving hats ? If Dark is there,
Heaven's mercy on his babes !

COUNTESS.

Can no one help ?

TYCHO.

He can, but no one here below. A cork
Were worth a hundred wherries.

COUNTESS.

Here is gold—

Or else for pity help us !

Enter Ferryman.

TYCHO.

Gold, boy, gold—
Thou mayest feed eels with florins in thy pocket.

FERRYMAN.

It is a sight for devils—away to bed !
Men must go mad, or run from it.

NETHERSTEIN *calls.*

She swamps—

The boat breaks under him.

RACHEL.

Didst say two nobles?

NEHERSTEIN *calls*.

They hold by stumps and branches—six or eight—
The strongest dies the last.

RACHEL.

Two Counts, didst say?

OTHO.

Count Altheim and the Lord of Rabensberg.
Give air—stand farther back.

RACHEL.

Of Rabensberg?

FERRYMAN.

Run with me to the skiff—it lies up stream—
Now stir and help me.

TYCHO.

Thou mayst wash thy face
Without my help, cock robin, or the Danube's;
In clearer water too. So bide content.
What dost thou want the skiff for?

FERRYMAN.

Come with me.

TYCHO.

Not to the Count.

FERRYMAN.

Set me afloat, and leave me.

CATHERINE.

Stop, Colen! hear me!

RACHEL.

Let him go, child—fie!

Ah, hussey!—shame upon thee!

FERRYMAN.

Hold her back—

And if I perish, as I think I shall—
For he that called me by my name just now,
Was farther off than all on this side death,
And spoke with louder tongue than nature uses—
Farewell to both! Instead of giving gold, (*to the Countess*.)
Receive her from me as a legacy—
I know thou wilt be good to her. [Exit.]

TYCHO.

Come back!

If man might help, I had not tarried here.
Nay—prithee—stop him, sir! wouldst drown thyself? [Exit.]

NETHERSTEIN.

'Twere easier stop the tempest. He is desperate !
Heaven's mercy go beside him wheresoe'er !
Look up, mouse !—deaf and speechless ?—in a swoon ?
My lady prays—pray too !—the angels hear thee !

RACHEL.

Wouldst have him bide, if he may save the Count ?

NETHERSTEIN.

He cannot save a hair of him. Look out—
Who watches at the casement there ?

M. MENNO *calls*.

Now for it—

The skiff is floating—if they could but wait.
Miller, come hither.

NETHERSTEIN.

I will look no more.

Is Colen in the skiff ? Do thou stay there.
I will not see him drowning.

M. MENNO *calls*.

Off ! she swims—

There is one in. Both ! both !—the boy goes too !

NETHERSTEIN.

I knew he would. Sir Otho, run down stream !
Be ready with the rest below—wait for him—
And land him if the current drift him thither. [*Exit Otho.*]

M. MENNO *calls*.

Scarce half have kept their hold—two more fall off !

NETHERSTEIN.

Can the skiff live, man ? does it near them yet ?

M. MENNO *calls*.

Hold fast a moment longer ! Three bide still.
They hang upon the driftwood's roots and branches.
The skiff is grounding—all must perish now !
Off—she is off again ! look ! now she floats !

NETHERSTEIN.

But can she reach them ? Have they loosed—or how ?

M. MENNO *calls*.

Swept past ! The boat swims wide and far below—
Gone by a mile ! Not one is on the shoal !

NETHERSTEIN.

Then mercy on them !—Colen in the boat ?

M. MENNO *calls*.

The boy is there.

NETHERSTEIN.

And not the ferryman?

M. MENNO *calls*.

There is but one—and he rows fast ashore—
He will do well enough :—pull mightily !
Pull, boy, for life !—What now ? His oars back water !
He waits for something !—Fool—to drown thyself !
By holy Nicholas—hands and heads above !
Hands on the tiller ! Bravely, Tycho, yet !
Row for thy life, good boy ! two heads astern !
Hold hard a moment longer, ferryman !
I see two heads !

NETHERSTEIN.

Then one of them is Colen's.

M. MENNO *calls*.

They fish them from the water—two are saved !
They land them—both of them—beside the boy !

NETHERSTEIN.

Then Colen left his skiff upon the shoal,
To swim down stream, and pick up one of them.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

Morning. A large Granary, connecting the House and the Corn-mill, furnished with meal-sacks, &c.

FERRYMAN and TYCHO.

FERRYMAN.

After their wrath the Heavens are friends with us.
They cast their dark and wintry cloaks away
To show like princes at a monarch's bridal.
Remorseless as they are to smile so soon
Above the scatterings of their cruelty ;
And quite forget how many saw their rage,
Who will not wake to feel their gentleness !

TYCHO.

What casts thee down so ? These are past the caring
For sun or squall ! They will not feel the heart-ache,
As we, with better luck, may live to do.

FERRYMAN.

Hast heard how many lost, and who they be ?
There were two noblemen ?

TYCHO.

We have our share.

One man in ten is saved, and he a Count.
Some think there was no other aboard. My lord
Says nothing, or as little ; snorts and snifts
The while they question him, but holds his peace :
Looks at them right and left, then up and down.
A maid of ten might sneeze as heartily.
The river hath gone nigh to melt his wits,
And wash his soul out. "Is your lordship sick ?"
"Ay," saith he. "Is your lordship well at ease ?"
"Ay," saith he too. The moon shines full upon him,
And will breed May-fly-maggots in his brain.
He walks a yard or less, and tires of it :
Smells at his kerchief daintily, then sighs,
And so sits down again to scratch his finger.
The hand inside and out must be regarded.

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FERRYMAN.

One special nurse he has beside his wife.

TYCHO.

His lady, sir,—his Countess—pray take heed !
 It were well worth a long pull up the stream
 To see this wife and her that shall be thine
 Placed side by side, like swans upon a pool ;
 'Midst whitest water-lilies, whitest swans,
 Save that the one of them is red with blushes,
 The while the other praises thee. Come down !
 And let them view thee now thy face is cleansed.
 The fish will profit by its last night's scouring ;
 And I shall save my grains.

FERRYMAN.

I must be hidden :

At least so much of me. Before she see it,
 Another noble lady must require it.

TYCHO.

She fain would have thee for her right-hand guest.
 There is no stint on such a holiday :
 But every breech is welcome to its stool.
 Free trenchers to all comers—forest hams,
 Pigs' faces garnished with their pettitoes,
 Soused ears, and collar'd brawn down both the tables !
 Fair pasties thank the mouths that eat them up.
 And there be such as watch the house-door open
 To bid the founder happy time of day.
 It is a sin to grieve at doing good. (*Sings.*)

The sun is mirthful up on high ;
 The earth is blushing at the sky ;
 The river laughs and ripples by ;
 It is the first of May, sir.

The chapel bell ringeth—the little bird singeth,
 The dew falls from the spray, sir.
 Whatever hand bringeth, we know whence joy springeth,
 Down on thy knees and pray, sir !

FERRYMAN.

Get back among the pasties, then I will.

TYCHO.

I never was in love but with my mother :
 And she was worth a church-full like Grace Geert.
 No swan, indeed ! but up by break of day
 To set my porridge hot upon the hob.
 Then Tycho was a nobleman. Her eyes

Were on him, going forth and coming home.
 He would feel better pleased to see them yet
 Than twenty such as Geert's, or Minna Been's.
 I shall grow fog-bound too if prisoned here.
 Come down and sun thyself. If fixed on fasting,
 And obstinate in emptiness—walk forth!
 The smoking ground smells sweetly after rain.
 Earth is a mighty mesh-tub—steaming, brewing:
 The blessed sun the brewer. This sick Count
 Is tethered for a day or two.

FERRYMAN.

At least.

The horse-boat must not swim 'midst shoals and eddies;
 And half his company would swamp the skiff.
 Nor can they leave their cattle here.

TYCHO.

Would'st know

What makes me glad?

FERRYMAN.

Ay—tell me.

TYCHO.

Thou shalt tarry.

Old Dark and Abraham Screech are with the saints.
 There is none other now on either side.
 I want the learning but to say—Amen.
 We need a wiser parson. What dost think
 Of warnings 'cross the Danube, in the wind?
 That voice which called thee by thy name, last night?
 Hallooing for life? It ducked, but should have drowned thee.

FERRYMAN.

Hark!

TYCHO.

What affrights thee?

FERRYMAN.

There are steps—look out!

TYCHO.

I hear the moon-light—creep—creep—creep. She has thee!
 There is no meal at hand.

FERRYMAN.

Hast got the key?

TYCHO.

It locks upon the outside—not within.

[*Stands on the sacks and looks out.*]

This Count alive again, by Rabshekeh !
 Peep 'twixt the shutters.—Softly with him, sir !
 He leans upon his kinsman. Gently !—so—
 They come abroad to sun and air themselves.
 If he look ever as he does to-day,
 He barely pays for saving.

FERRYMAN.

Which way go they ?

TYCHO.

Why, this way—straightway—hitherward, direct.

FERRYMAN.

How shall I 'scape, or hide me ?

TYCHO.

Face their faces—

Thine is as good as theirs. Why shouldst thou hide it ?
 They made no contract with thee.

FERRYMAN.

Help this once !

'Twere better leap the window-sill.

TYCHO.

Come down !

Wouldst break thy legs ?

FERRYMAN.

They are upon the stairs !

Pull forth a sack or two before the ruck !

[Removes a sack of corn.]

Make me a hole behind it.

TYCHO.

Get thee in :

Snug as a parlour—here is room for two.
 With bread and cheese, I could endure a sevensnight.
 Sit down and go to sleep.

FERRYMAN.

A sack above—

Here, cross the top, boy !

TYCHO.

I will roof thee in.

They rest upon the landing-place.

FERRYMAN.

Make haste !

TYCHO.

Wilt have a larger chimney over head ?
 More breathing space ? So, here he is !—wheeze, wheeze.

[*As the Count and Otho enter, he turns his back and sings.*

"Her girdle was golden, her garments were green ;
So I asked where she came from, and who she might be :
'A king is my father, my mother a queen ;
And I come from the salt-sea, for love, child, of thee.'"

This trap is old and naught, like father John.
Even rat-traps will wear out ! as saith the text.
Vermin can slip their legs from 'twixt his teeth :
He missed a weasel yesterday.

[*Sings :*

"If thou art a mermaid, and dwell in the water,
That is not the life which seems pleasing to me :
Though I be a goatherd, and thou a king's daughter,
I will not go with thee all under the sea."

She is denied of him, but says again :

"My coach is a"—Save us ! what wouldst have ?
I do abhor to be affrighted thus.
Your servant, sir ! but why shouldst come behind me ?

OTHO.

What frights thee, gentle goatherd—not the mermaid ?
The younger of the Ferrymen, my lord !

TYCHO.

His grace is welcome ! By the mass, he looked
More mermaid-like at sunset yestereven,
Than he doth now—except that such as they,
Swim not with boots and spurs upon their legs.
I give your lordship happy time of day !

COUNT.

Thou canst not ; yet I thank thee, boy.

TYCHO.

No ! why ?

The merry heart is meat, drink, clothes, and fuel.
Most feel but simple when we fish them out.
A bellyful of nothing makes one sorry :
Water is worse ! Colen strove all he might—
Did he not, sir ?—to keep both heads from drinking.
He ever swims breast high, and looks about.
My lord came landward like a wounded coot :
And Colen, with him, like a water-rug—
Only he doth not carry in his mouth.

OTHO.

Thy likenesses lack nothing for resemblance,
But being unlike.

TYCHO.

They do not hook-and-eye
Both top and bottom, fitting everywhere ;
But hold i' the midst. This Colen knows a Count
For what he is, although his hat be off:
And picked him, half-way under, out from three.
He could discern a Count drowned fifty years,
If he might see a rag on's skeleton.
So might I too, while lords wore crimson breeches,
And clad their serving-men in Lutzen-blue.
Not now ; but almost always guess amiss.

COUNT.

Where is this Ferryman ?

TYCHO.

He hides him somewhere—
Creeps out of sight for fear the moonshine blind him.
Unless he ride on Gipsej to the smith.
Her shoes want shifting. Here is roguery, sir !
When iron was thirteen thalers to the pood,
They made it tougher-grained than now they do.
Two sets would last above a quarter's wearing—
A rat-trap twenty years.

COUNT.

Go, find thy fellow.
The lives of both were risked for mine last night.

TYCHO.

His was, but mine was not.

COUNT.

Didst thou not help ?

TYCHO.

I helped the ferryman—and he the Count.

COUNT.

Well—canst thou find this ferryman, or no ?

TYCHO.

Patience ! Speak softly, sir ! A rat has ears :
He learns, by listening, what we talk about.
Help me to shift the bean-sacks next that bin.
The rogue is somewhere under, or behind.
There be but six-score quarters. Do our best,
And we shall near him yet by supper-time.

COUNT.

I cannot help thee.

OTHO.
Seek for Colen, boy.

TYCHO.
I was about to do so :—when I find him,
What shall say to him?

OTHO.
We stay to thank him.

TYCHO.
He ever doth eschew men's thanks.

COUNT.
Be gone—
And bring, or leave him, as he will. More air
And easier breathing here—we can sit down—
The house grows noisy.

TYCHO.
I will leave him then.
My charge it is to lock the door behind me,
While Melchior scowers the pewter.

COUNT.
Lock us in—
So that thou lock out others.

TYCHO.
For how long?
COUNT.
Release me after dinner : now adieu !

TYCHO.
Then have your eyes upon the sacks for pity !
If he should bolt, sir, head him back again ! *[Exit, singing.]*

This is the rat the meal that stole,
And powdered his whiskers rarely !
This is the cat that watched the hole,
And fixed his worship fairly !
This is the dog that ordered the whole,
And scapes from hanging barely !

OTHO.
At last, we are quit of him.

COUNT.
He leaves us room,
If time and strength suffice, for that which brought us.
Speak quickly, Jucold—tell me of my sleep,
And what was said while waking ?

OTHO.

When, my lord ?

COUNT.

Wast present when they landed me last night ?

OTHO.

I was.

COUNT.

Who else beside these ferrymen ?

OTHO.

Some six or seven were there.

COUNT.

What said I, boy ?

OTHO.

Nothing, my lord.

COUNT.

Nothing—or nonsense—which ?

OTHO.

There scarce was so much sense as serves for nonsense.

COUNT.

But afterwards ?

OTHO.

The twilight dawned at last.

COUNT.

What said I then ?

OTHO.

Half words, and those half uttered :

Inaudible enquiries sunk in sighs :

The Countess, Rabensberg, myself, and more—

Stilled out by syllables.

COUNT.

But was this all ?

Did Gertrude speak to me ?

OTHO.

Sometimes she did—

Small nursery questions, such as help remembrance.

COUNT.

Of whom ?

OTHO.

Yourself—if cold, or warm, or easy.

And sometimes of her cousin Rabensberg.

COUNT.

Were answered how ?

OTHO.

Faith, many not at all :
Most part by sobs and silence.

COUNT.

But this cousin ?
We talked of Baron Rabensberg, it seems ?

OTHO.

Not otherwise.

COUNT.

I shall speak plainer, soon :
And I must trust thee, Otho.

OTHO.

Trust me, how ?

COUNT.

A perilous trust, boy—since thou hast at hand
Thy book of grievances for ready reference—
A trespass-roll of slights and injuries
Set down, from time to time, as helps for memory :
Rash words, and casual wrongs : the ancient cyphering
Which kinsmen use to balance charity—
Written, I say, with truth, and all against me.
Therefore a dangerous trust it is.

OTHO.

Of slights ?

I never said so.

COUNT.

Thou hast thought so, Jucold.

OTHO.

As heaven is witness, never !

COUNT.

Why dost start ?

OTHO.

My lord will hear me !

COUNT.

Presently I will.

Hear what, boy ?—what affrights thee ? There must be
Such thoughts between us two, as make it easier
To say I trust, than love thee. Thou canst pay
All grievances together in an hour—
My sparing kindnesses when I was kind,

Imperious looks at other times—the wrongs
Which chafe dependence, be they light or heavy,
Supposed or true.

OTHO.

What then, my lord?

COUNT.

Why then

I shall stand one step nearer hell, than now;
There is but one.—Go, hearken at the door.

OTHO.

This eager speaking wearies you—sit down.

(Count leans against the sacks which hide Ferryman.)

COUNT.

Ay—but I must haste forward. Thou hast heard
Of Gertrude's other cousin?—She had two—
A younger brother to the one she asks for?
Let us pass by this Baron Rabensberg—
I say, the younger.

OTHO.

John of Rabensberg?

COUNT.

Well, John—and what hast heard of him? Speak truth.

OTHO.

What might offend in telling, perhaps.

COUNT.

No matter!

Say what thou wilt, I must say worse.

OTHO.

He was

The comrade of my lord—he should have been
The husband of his Countess.

COUNT.

Should have been!

So far the tale is shorter, then—Go on.

OTHO.

Nay, let the gossips bail their own report!
Why make me sponsor to their forgeries?
What part in it have I?—They painted, gilded,
And robed their wooden image royally!
No garniture was found too gorgeous for him.
They wrote his title in the list of men
Whom Nature sets like columns near her shrine
On loftier pedestals, as more adorned,
And wrought of purer metal than the rest,

To hang her costliest gifts upon !—Betrothed,
 And almost married to the Baroness—
 This John of Rabensberg—the younger brother—
 Was superseded by his friend, they said !
 His friend and fellow-soldier stepped between !
 One that came with him as a marriage guest !
 To quicken pity for this lamb of theirs,
 They crowned his head with flowers—the good ! the gentle !
 First both in mirth and meekness—yet so chaste,
 That tongues of older men were shamed from evil !
 The soldier followed with his eyes—the child
 With both his hands stretched out !

COUNT.

Thy breath revives

A carcase which would make me desperate now :
 Blast me for ever, if we stood indeed
 Bare-bosomed at the steadfast seat of truth,
 With none to plead for pale humanity—
 Our errors, our temptations all swept out,
 While Justice weighed us, each one as he is,
 And irrespectively of accident,
 Rejecting love and pity from the scale,
 As guilty or not guilty.

OTH.

If we did ?

Ay, but we do not stand there. If we did,
 We were accursed—both you and I, my lord.
 Then such betrayal were accursed indeed !
 But Love, though unacquitted, grasps so fast
 The feet of Mercy, that he must be heard.
 Could youth approach thus near, and then stand off ?

COUNT.

These tell-tales have gained faith, it seems ?—thou dost
 With all thy might excuse Love's guiltiness.
 A skilful advocate, but ill divine !
 Thou should'st have known at that time what inflamed it,
 When reason superscribed all fancy wrote ;
 A joyful witness of its promises ;
 Confirming outward grace by more within.
 Pure love, strong faith, chaste beauty's majesty !

OTH.

I have known since, my lord.

COUNT.

Its shade at most :

A faded portrait gazed at in the dusk !
Even I, who stand so near to it, can see
The change from love's and beauty's radiancy,
To that reproachful hue which grief has bleached,
Like marble-breasted Niobe's, with tears.

OTHO.

Some think this marble holds a heart yet harder.

COUNT.

No matter what they think. I would it were so.
Better feel nothing than too much ! Who thinks it ?

OTHO.

'Midst other changes, is this possible,
That men may love and hate at once ? That love
Made mad by scorn, may so far hate the scorner
As not to lose the properties of love ?

COUNT.

Why dost thou ask me ?

OTHO.

I believe it may.

Love made my lord unfaithful—what made her ?
This seraph left her sunshine in the skies,
To light upon the reptile prey of gold !
Born rich and noble, must be more than both !
So dropped her lover, kinsman, almost husband ;
The good, the gentle—but the youngest born,
Even for his friend, a guest of yesterday !

COUNT.

All wide, and far beyond the mark ! Thou aimest
Thine arrows at the innocent : they pierce
My side instead. The treachery is confessed—
Dost also know the traitors ? There were two—
Two were betrayed by them—canst guess and pair us ?

OTHO.

The lovers ?—what, not both of them betrayed ?

COUNT.

Ay, and the traitors went by couples too.
This Baron Rabensberg was one of them :
John's brother, whom you looked for yesterday.

OTHO.

How could the elder profit by his loss ?
John halved no lordships with him ? Perhaps, indeed
He loved her too ?

COUNT.

He never said he did ;
But I believe he did. Nay, who did not !
So near in blood, and sharing one estate,
Opinion matched them on their nurse's knees :
But Nature laughs at gossip's policy,
Widening preposterous difference to extremes.
As hills in storm and sunshine, light and shade,
These brothers stood confronting one another :
Yet were they not, in all things, all unlike.
That which the other wanted, each had most.
Opposed they were, but not dissimilar.
Envy burns hottest 'gainst the first and nearest :
A stranger's rivalry torments us less
Than smiles upon the lip we know so well !
Beside the partial gifts of love and grace,
A younger brother sharing one estate !
Equalled with him !—his peer !

OTHO.

My lord grows faint.

COUNT.

I cannot tell the rest, boy.

OTHO.

Let it be.

I think I can by guess alone.

COUNT.

Then do.

OTHO.

The losers helped each other ; I know not how—
But peradventure thus it might have been :
Some baseness whispered, some imputed guilt,
Such as pate-shaking pity marvels at,
And fain would hide for sake of charity.
No matter what they were, if she believed them.
Scorn would shut ears and heart 'gainst truth and mercy !
She would not listen to one word.

COUNT.

She would not.
John thought she dared not—crediting, like you,
Inconstant preference for my state to his.
Disdain it was which gave the bride away :
Not avarice nor ambition. Ask no more :
We are, and shall be childless.

OTHO.

John a soldier
Was easily entreated, after all,
And passing patiently marched off elsewhere !
Yet do they say he died like one.

COUNT.

He died
With twenty thousand more and not a braver—
His friends on either hand, not face to face :
His blood an offering to the soil which reared him,
Not to a woman's scorn and fickleness.
So much, for truth's sake, of him. Now this Baron.
The kernel of our moral is to come.
At last I reach it, but I break my teeth.
The elder brother saw me in the place
The younger fell from—I was Gertrude's husband—
Joint heir, with him, at Rabensberg—his heir
If longer lived, and he without a child.
The gain was this adoption of an alien—
A stranger for a brother—and at last,
His name and lordship swallowed up in mine !
The rival gone, the brother lived again !
He turned, at first, his Cain-like brow this way,
Then fled from me.

OTHO.

I would be shunned by such.

COUNT.

If safely, so would I. But seven years' silence
Might end in noise enough. Our lands were mixed :
We could not quit the thoughts of one another.
And Gertrude, wondering at her kinsman's wrath,
Would be his guest at Rabensberg to quench it :
So sent me on to bear the olive-branch.
At first the petted hound felt pleased and flattered :
A moment's sunshine fell upon his spirit.
He would run with me here to meet his cousin.
But soon he swerved again ! Ten times a day,
On this side Rabensberg, his humour shifted.
Rough roads and weather made rough tempers worse.
We reached the Danube wearied by mishaps.
In wilder eddies beat the rain against us
A mile, or less, below the crossing place :
It choked and blinded us. While some ran on,
The grooms and horses were sent back a stage.

A little moss-walled quarry arched with roots—
Scooped out by panting goats for shade in spring—
Close to the river's margin, held us two,
While those before us sought the ferrymen.
Ere this received us, Saul's mad spirit was on him.
He would not cross—he would go back again!
What could he tell the Countess if they met?
That both were traitors, and his brother belied?
At last I lost my patience too—"If both—
Which first? which made the other such?" I said.
This changed his mind once more. By all things just,
He would reveal the treason ere he slept!
A hundred imprecations pledged him now.
More furious than the tempest over-head,
He was upon his legs before they ceased.
I caught and held him by the cloak a moment—
He turned to strike me with his riding-rod.
And now the fiend was busy with us both—
The bank sustained him, but my sword passed through him
So far that when I would have plucked it out,
His carcase followed it, and fell my way,
Hiding the hilt beneath it.

OTHO.

Through his back?

COUNT.

Ay, but he struck me!—there was no choice given me
'Twixt back and breast. 'Twere easier touch a snake—
I must have thrown him round to get my weapon.
Both swords are there, and his within its sheath.

OTHO.

How then? What followed?

COUNT.

How I reached the boat,
And what I taught the servants, is recalled
Like last night's brawls by drunkards. They stood mute.
The ferrymen refused to cross with me.
But gold prevailed on these, and threats the others—
I forced them hither.

OTHO.

We are swallowed up
By fortune's whirlpool; then tossed out again!
Ten witnesses there were, beside these swords;
And now, behold, not one!

T

COUNT.

A child might launch
The carcase from so steep a bank down stream :
But I, to-day, could not. It was for life !
The wolf had seized my throat, boy ! Wilt discharge
This office for me ?—first, pluck out the sword,
And cast it from the body far enough—
So sink them both ?

OTHO.

Wait till the sun goes down.

COUNT.

But yet be speedy, Jucold !

OTHO.

Here they come !—

A mile below the crossing-place ?

COUNT.

Less—less :

Let us walk forth ; we may discern it, hence.

TYCHO heard singing.

“ ‘Why, what dost thou think of me ?’ quoth our king merrily,
‘Passing thy judgment upon me so brief?’
‘Both by leader and filler,’ then answered the miller,
‘I guess thee to be but some gentleman-thief.’ ”

If I have dropped the key, now ! Stop awhile—
These pockets must be patched again. Hast seen him ?

OTHO.

The key ?

TYCHO.

The rat, sir. Lord, what thing wast meant for !
He is not off ? Wilt tarry while I run ?

OTHO.

Tarry for what ?

TYCHO.

The ferrets.

COUNT.

Let us out !

TYCHO.

Well, patience ! said the hermit to his belly.

COUNT.

Sirrah, hast lost the key ?

TYCHO.

Hast lost the rat,
 Sirrah, my lord the Count? O, here it is! [*Enter Tycho.*
 My lord is looked for up and down the house.
 They soon will help the sun with candle-light,
 And sweep to find him.

OTHO.

Why didst keep us then?

TYCHO.

The chine kept me, pig's-cheek, and tansey-pudding,
 The leathern stoup, Grace Geert, and Minna Been;
 I had all these to think upon—beside
 The elder Ferryman.

COUNT.

Hast found him, owl?

TYCHO.

Your eaglish highness has not found the rat;
 Therefore, we have not found him.

COUNT.

Look again.

TYCHO.

I will.

OTHO.

Make haste, and send him after us.

TYCHO.

Ay, marry, sir. A pleasant time of day!
 My blessing on all three. I would be rid
 Of such a wardenship—so peace go with ye!
 The Countess frets about his lordship's health.
 The moon has boiled a treacle-posset for him.
 Therefore, fair speed, and maledicite! [*Ex. Count and Otho.*

Sings:

“Now run, now run, thou little foot-page!
 The saints thee save and see!
 Go, hie thee back, I do engage
 To die, or set him free.”

[*He removes the sacks, and lifts the Ferryman.*

Why Colen!—mercy on us!—weak as withs!
 What ails thee, primrose? frightened, or bewitched?
 I kept thee in too long: but by Saint Pippin,
 I meant to vex, not choke thee.

FERRYMAN.

Stand aside.

TYCHO.

Thou art not mealed again ; and yet thy face
Is white as Gabriel's bleaching-mead ! What ails thee ?
Four leagues up stream in August would not sweat thee
As those four sacks have done. Hast been asleep ?

FERRYMAN.

I wish to think so.

TYCHO.

What didst dream of ?

FERRYMAN.

Treachery.

Wilt help me yet this second time ?

TYCHO.

This sixtieth.

FERRYMAN.

I have to do what needs more hands than mine :
And yet it shall be done.

TYCHO.

Thy wits were lost

'Twixt noon and sunset yesterday : to-day
The fit comes earlier. There were cries for help—
A voice across the Danube—fie upon thee !
What hearest thou now ?

FERRYMAN.

The same a second time.

Go thou, and I will shew thee in a mile
The lips they came from.

TYCHO.

If they shout so loud

I need not go.

FERRYMAN.

I will.

TYCHO.

For what ?

FERRYMAN.

For vengeance.

TYCHO.

Nay, by the saints in glory—I will not !
Ask grace upon thy knees against the fiend.
I do abhor to see thee gnaw thy lip.
What part have we with vengeance ?

FERRYMAN.

Justice, Tycho.
Blood calls for that, at least. Wilt help, or leave me?
No more than justice.

TYCHO.

What didst hear them talk of?
I will not quit thee.

FERRYMAN.

Keep the skiff afloat.
I must be masked again.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

Chamber.

COUNTESS and CATHERINE.

COUNTESS.

He sickens at their names—so all are lost !
I will no farther question him. Alas !
That good and ill should mix their snakes and flowers,
Like Pluto's married head by Proserpine's !
If I might take my fortunes how I pleased,
Provided that I took them, they should come
Each kind apart.

CATHERINE.

'Twere better so receive them,
Being wisely joined or severed for our good,
Even as they are sent.

COUNTESS.

Fair preacher on the text,
We profit by mischances ! 'Midst the wreck
Where perished husbands, brothers, fathers, sons,
I find a sister.

CATHERINE.

One poor servant gained
For many better lost.

COUNTESS.

They were not lost,
But rashly squandered to appease impatience.
How shall we meet their eyes who wait our coming ?
I will not go to Rabensberg.

CATHERINE.

Where then ?

COUNTESS.

Back, home again, fair sister. Thou art mine—
Thy mother's gift and lover's legacy.
He dying, as he thought, bequeathed thee to me,
And I will keep thee. Where hast hidden this Colen,
Who dares confront the hideous face of death,
But not my thanks and mine ?

CATHERINE.

My mother scares him.
There is some pledge of patience toward myself,
While he keeps out of sight.

Enter Count and Otho.

COUNTESS.

Now, are they found?

OTHO.

One is—the boy.

COUNT.

We shall not need them yet.
Let me grow stronger-stomached for this ferry.
My last night's surfeit spoils the appetite.

COUNTESS.

Then let us back again.

COUNT.

Wait till to-morrow.

COUNTESS.

Well, so we will; but not to cross the Danube.

COUNT.

I must, at least. Otho shall pass before us,
To sound the shoals, and choose a landing-place.

OTHO.

Mild as he seems again to those escaped,
The river has consumed his banks, and lifts
His sands above the surface.

Enter Ferryman disguised, and Tycho.

COUNT.

What is this?

A miller, or a meal-sack set on legs?
The calendars have erred if Yule come yet.
Our clowns are welcome with the holidays:
Never till after harvest-home.

COUNTESS.

Hard words

Rebound the farthest when they strike our friends:
'Tis masker's sport. The taller of the two
Has seen a Countess at his knee. He lent
His life to prayers and pity—nay, he gave it,
Who hoped it not again.

TYCHO.

More fool for that.

COUNT.

Is this the Ferryman?

COUNTESS.

More fool—why so?

TYCHO.

The Counts, being wise, take pity on themselves.
 They swim not home with half-drowned ferrymen.
 It is the ass goes undermost.

COUNT.

No matter;
 He goes the road to fortune. This may build
 A bridge above the stream ye could not ferry,
 Which runs so deep 'twixt penury and ease.
 Now may he gallop dry-shod if he will. (*offers a purse*).

FERRYMAN.

There will be time to settle what is owing.
 We cross the Danube ere I take my toll.
 I have not done mine office yet, my lord.

COUNT.

So much as saving life is perfected.

FERRYMAN.

That part is not for payment. I will have
 Full measure, length and breadth, nor more nor less.
 It may be greater than my lord has thought of.
 We reckon ere we part.

COUNTESS.

I fain would see
 His face unshelled, who gives like Jupiter,
 And takes like Rhadamanthus.

COUNT.

There must hide
 Less wit than honesty beneath the crust.

OTHO.

If Tycho scorned the daughter of a king,
 What chance have we to tempt him?

TYCHO.

Build the bridge!

Get Colen fairly on it, then I follow.
 My place is close behind him. Wet or dry,
 We ever pull one way. In this we differ,
 His wits have blown his wisdom all to rags:
 Mine do nor good nor harm.

COUNT.

Whence came that tempest?

TYCHO.

The way of pride it came; by emptiness—
A foul and windy quarter. He puts off
The grace he had to eat his meat with patience :
So dreams of dreadful things—woe—witchcraft—wedlock !
If I rowed stokesman, I could trust my lord :
His money might come fairly, nevertheless.
Seeing that he is none other than he is,
I think no scorn of him.

COUNTESS.

Leave them to me.

My debt is greatest, and began the first.
Colen will take my surety for us both.
I did not covenant to pay with gold ;
But shall find means to keep our bail from forfeit.
Wilt thou not trust me, Colen ?

FERRYMAN.

No, my lady.

Let these bear witness that we two are quits.
Our river manners here are foul not false :
Therefore I pray have patience and endure them.
For your sake, no. There is a spell upon me.
None come so near me as to love me, hate me,
Befriend me, injure me, have dealings with me—
But fares the worse for me. Ask Catherine that :
Who suffers most, knows best. The poor man's cradle
Is looked upon by those same stars which shine
O'er purple couches at the birth of kings :
Their influence is alike, be it good or evil.
Few mark the narrow path which baseness walks in ;
But each of us has one he needs must tread :
Our choice is *how*, not *whither*. I had given me
An easy-gaited spirit for life's road :
Strong hands, light thoughts, brave health, glad thankfulness.
These be good gifts, which none may share with me.
To wish me well is perilous.

COUNTESS.

That is risked.

I fain would make the hazard twice as great,
By doing after wishing.

FERRYMAN.

Wait awhile !

Sometimes our wishes are o'er-ruled in mercy.
Before they pray again, those lips may curse.

TYCHO.

Dost think that ladies curse, and slap their pockets,

Like Judeth Bounce? Fie on thee, simple one!
 Curse thee! Lord help thee! This is but by fits:
 His speech was clerkly more than most till late.
 Such muddy manners grieve not every day.
 Speak for him, mistress Starlight!—Come thy ways—
 She weeps, and cannot speak!

FERRYMAN.

Wilt row down stream?
 These bodies should be looked for 'midst the wreck
 And driftwood's tanglement. Old Dark and Screitch—
 With eight or nine—and one a nobleman?

COUNT.

Who told thee so?

FERRYMAN.

Methought there was another—
 A Count and Baron in the boat last night?—
 Your lordship's kinsman told me so.

OTHO.

Did I?

FERRYMAN.

Ay, thou—the Baron Rabensberg.

OTHO.

I said

We looked for two.

FERRYMAN.

What tidings of them, then?
 Yon looked for two—and one is present here:
 Hast asked about the other yet—or no?

TYCHO.

Can the Count count his company?

FERRYMAN.

How now?

A nobleman not thought of!

OTHO.

Who says that?

FERRYMAN.

Why dodge and double like a pounded stote?
 Is the man drowned? Was he aboard last night?
 In twenty hours not asked for?

COUNTESS.

Altheim, speak—

I will know all.

FERRYMAN.

A nobleman, good sooth !
 The widow Riful's innocent is missing—
 Slipped out of sight to sleep beneath the thorns—
 A fool, and mad beside, these forty years !
 All throats are hoarse with hallooing up and down.
 Or Melchior's colt is off with Gregorie's mule—
 We hunt them east and west. A nobleman,
 My lady's kinsman—some one said her cousin ?

COUNTESS.

He is so.

FERRYMAN.

What has happened to him, then ?
 This Baron's lordship falls to son or brother—
 His cousin the Count is not his heir, I trow ?
 Has he a brother, my lady ?

TYCHO.

Cousins are cheap

As crabs at Martinmas.

FERRYMAN.

A shepherd's cur
 Whose mongrel ancestors were hanged by scores,
 Is better cared for here !

COUNT.

Take thy purse hence—
 Or let it lie. (*throws it down.*)

OTHO.

He has been asked about.

FERRYMAN.

Then what the news, sir ? He turned back again ?
 Was drowned—or how ?

COUNT.

This knave grows insolent.

COUNTESS.

Speak—was he with you ? I will know it at once !

FERRYMAN.

Where must we look for him ? by land or water ?
 And how expect to find him, wet or dry ?
 The scabbard empty, or the sword within it ?
 A soulless body, or the two together ?

OTHO.

My lord grows faint. The otter-hearted brute,

Whom all things flee from, or else fare the worse for,
Can lose no friends, nor guess why those who do
Should shudder thus, and grieve for them.

TYCHO.

Ye thought

The otter did not swim too fast last night;
But prized him for it.

COUNTESS.

Help us to the couch :

He swoons again ! Wait here, child.

[*Exeunt.*]

(*Ferryman and Catherine remain.*)

FERRYMAN.

What ! in tears ?

Still tears ?

CATHERINE.

You forced them from me, Colen !

FERRYMAN.

I ?

Then chide again, but smile again.

CATHERINE.

Some say

That not one day is happy all day through :
Therefore I should be patient. Less than half
Of one like this, would pay for ten of tears.

FERRYMAN.

What changed it thus ?

CATHERINE.

I have heard many speak,
With all their wit, in praise of something like thee,
But what they said seemed little or amiss.
To-day, a skilful tongue has tired its music,
And made thy praises perfect.

FERRYMAN.

Didst not blush !

CATHERINE.

I did, as one that shared in them—yet hoped
To hear them every day, and follow hence
The sounds I loved the best.

FERRYMAN.

Whither wouldst go ?

CATHERINE.

To Rabensberg or Schwannenstadt.

FERRYMAN.

Indeed !

CATHERINE.

You gave me to the Countess, and she claims me—
My mother lends me. I shall learn to speak
With purer words, and walk with shorter steps.

FERRYMAN.

Forgetting home and ferryman?—there is
No way so sure. Thou dost not weep for that ?

CATHERINE.

Why push the open palm of kindness from us ?
I have beheld thee patient with the froward :
While ribald ignorance has barked against thee,
Bow down thy head, like flowers before the wind,
To let its loud and ruffian gusts pass by—
Never till now ungentle. It is well
To shun, but not to scorn such thanks.

FERRYMAN.

Dost love

This Countess, Catherine ?

CATHERINE.

Ay, too much, I fear.

FERRYMAN.

Too much—why so ?

CATHERINE.

Because I did too soon.

Slow growths are surest. But she must be good !
I fain would have thee love her.

FERRYMAN.

So I do.

CATHERINE.

She calls me sister.

FERRYMAN.

I must grieve thy sister.

CATHERINE.

For my sake, not again !

FERRYMAN.

So near to greatness,

Wouldst not be great ?

CATHERINE.

With all my heart, I would.

FERRYMAN.

A Countess ?

CATHERINE.

Ay, an Empress.

FERRYMAN.

What wilt grant me ?

CATHERINE.

A crown.

FERRYMAN.

Heaven bless your majesty, if less.

CATHERINE.

Both crown and sceptre—globe and eagle too.

FERRYMAN.

Thy subjects, like thy mother, would dethrone me.

CATHERINE.

Farewell to greatness, then ! I would become
That which I am again. Hark ! Get thee gone !

[*Exit Ferryman.*]

(*Enter Countess and Otho.*)

COUNTESS.

Excuse, and leave us, Catherine. (*Exit Catherine.*) This
way, sir.

Dost brave, or hast forgotten what I said ?

OTHO.

Neither, my lady.

COUNTESS.

Why dost tarry, then ?

OTHO.

I have an office here. My lord employs me.
This tarrying is in duty—his appointment.
How may I quit ?

COUNTESS.

A faithful servant, truly,
Whom yet his lord must learn to do without !
The river runs between us ere we sleep—
Choose thou the side that pleases thee.

OTHO.

Till now

There was no time for choice, and now there is
No power on my part—since he chooses for me.

COUNTESS.

Canst thou not feign some present haste?

OTHO.

What kind?

Suggest the occasion for it.

COUNTESS.

I suggest!

What wrong have I done? Wherefore help to hide one?

I lack the readiness of ancient use—

A lie would make me blush. Thou hast at hand,

Beside the gifts of nature, art and practice.

Large as they were, long study must have helped.

OTHO.

These arrows stick, indeed: but some as sharp

Have pierced the innocent too! My kinsman needs me.

COUNTESS.

Needs thee for what?

OTHO.

To find a landing-place.

COUNTESS.

A perilous charge! I prithee set about it.

Then trust thy learning to the ferrymen,

And so pass on. They may report the issue.

OTHO.

It is a perilous charge—ill fit for them.

My lord has business which they share not with me.

His work is better perfected alone.

COUNTESS.

It should be little fit for honest men,

If left to thee in preference.

OTHO.

So it is.

The worse and harder part he did himself.

I take the rest of it.—My lord expects me.

COUNTESS.

He did expect to find a beggar thankful:

He looked for truth, and thought that he might trust thee.

OTHO.

He doth so still; beyond my seeking too—

Less for mine ease than his.

COUNTESS.

What wouldst thou, sirrah !
 Speak plainly if thou canst. Let loose the leash
 Which holds back insolence. Darest thou say this !
 And this to me since yesterday ? Be brief :
 Tell me what trust ?

OTHO,

It would be marred if published.

COUNTESS.

Employs thee in it ?

OTHO.

Full trust—sole agency—
 Especial preference in a charge of weight.

COUNTESS.

The more his need to learn his secret's safety :
 And mine the more to warn him.

OTHO.

Scarce in time
 For his behoof. I shall be spared my pains—
 So profit most.

COUNTESS.

By chastisement, or how ?

OTHO.

He lacks both heart and instrument for that.
 The sheath came safe ashore, but not the weapon.

COUNTESS.

Dost brave the sick in bed ? Art so much bolder
 Because his sword is lost ? Both coward and traitor ?

OTHO.

I know where I may find it.

COUNTESS.

Thou dost know
 That shame is sometimes patient of its wrongs ;
 Since vengeance on the base is near to baseness.
 I risk it nevertheless. Come in !

OTHO.

Beware !—
 This ruin is not mine ! Hush, hush !—for his sake !
 If present, he would ask it on his knee.
 Better to face that last-night's tempest twice,
 Than meet such witnesses, with me before them.
 Tell what you will to him.

COUNTESS.

A braggart now—

To-morrow a beggar, too.

OTHO.

Beware of that

Which may turn love to hate!

COUNTESS.

If scorn may do it,

I would attempt impossibility,
And strain abhorrence yet.

OTHO.

Go gently with me

Sole heiress of John Rabensberg's sole brother—
Count Altheim's wife—I warn her.

COUNTESS.

She defies thee!

Gertrude of Rabensberg has never answered
A threat in other words, nor will she ever.
If ruin rest with thee, let it come down;
I called thee traitor—coward.

OTHO.

And so is he.

COUNTESS.

Who is?

OTHO.

Count Altheim—both of them.

COUNTESS.

Well-timed,

And reckoned carefully!—his sword is lost.

OTHO.

I go to find it.

COUNTESS.

Whither?

OTHO.

Where he left it.

—So now for heart to second all this bravery—
Fixed in your cousin's back—your elder cousin's—
Not John's—he stabbed that too—with other weapons:
This time it was the Baron Rabensberg's—
Brother to him who was betrothed, half-married,
Belied, supplanted by his friend and bridegroom.
I spare no repetitions. I speak out.
My work is not for ferrymen:—and yet

U

The tallest guessed it like an oracle.
 One brother fell in battle—both are slain—
 The elder by that sick-man's hand last night.
 Count Altheim's sword is in the Baron's back,
 The Baron's in its sheath. I go to seek them.

COUNTESS.

What liar said this?

OTHO.

Count Altheim told it me :
 A liar confessed—his wife was gained by lying :
 But haply here he may be credited.
 Go, wake this husband—tell him what I say—
 Bring him, and call his servants.

COUNTESS.

Bravely done !
 I must, at last, in part retract my scorn—
 Excess of wickedness has something great !
 Dost think I credit half one word ?

OTHO.

I do.
 Else why so pale ? All three are ruined now !
 The spot on which to test me is at hand ;
 A mile, or less, below the crossing-place.
 Send all the servants—both the ferrymen ;
 Wilt trust us if we bring this cousin's corpse ?

COUNTESS.

Stop here—who told thee so ?

OTHO.

Count Altheim told me,
 Who would excuse this second murder thus,
 He slew his own confederate in the first ;
 For John was foully murdered—slain in battle—
 But stabbed to death before. Look, tears at last !
 Ah me ! a lie gained easier credence once,
 Than truth does now ! But call your wisdom back—
 Chain up this frenzy ! we may heal all yet :—
 A credulous infidel !

COUNTESS.

Count Altheim told it ?

OTHO.

I say once more, his sword is in the corpse.
 He needed help to hide it—so revealed it—
 And not as giving vent to yeasty conscience,

For truth sake, or repentance sake. I go
To sound the river with these ferrymen ;
Seek out a landing-place, and leave them there :
Then walk below, to sink our lordship-sharer
Where justice may not find him. He lies near,
Not in the stream. You scourged the apple from me—
This Baron shared the guilt, but not the gain—
His conscience grew perplexed—and late remorse
Might breed offence. All three of us are traitors—
One only stabs men's backs ! At last you trust me ?

COUNTESS.

What wouldst thou have ?

OTHO.

But little till I earn it :

No more than silence, yet.

COUNTESS.

Then cease and leave me.

[*Exit Otho.*]

COUNTESS.

Both dead ! one murdered !—It is come at last !
Our seven years' knot is loose enough ! I pay
In full to heaven the purchase of my pride !
And this knave too—who smiles and teaches silence—
He holds my ruin in his hand ! He will
At better leisure talk of love again !
Threaten and smile, by turns ! In pity he
Will hint but now and then at former scorn,
Content with present suppleness !—He will ?
Ah, will he so ? And must I watch the face
Of double murder ?—hold my peace before it ?
Shall pride which, like the fiend, has led to this,
Forsake me now ? Stronger than love or pity,
It drove him out who was too meek for vengeance,
Too noble for complaint !

[*Exit.*]

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Hall, with tables prepared for supper.

NETHERSTEIN and RACHEL.

RACHEL.

Set seats for five : but when the guests are placed,
Prithee keep out of sight awhile.

NETHERSTEIN.

How long ?

Were keeping out of sight my business here,
I might have spared the Saltsberg belt and hose
'Till All Saints eve or wake at Martinmas.
Places should have respect to use and fitness.
If so, and eating be the end of feasts,
Mine would stand highest of all.

RACHEL.

The Count is sick.

NETHERSTEIN.

Let him keep out of sight, and me eat for him.

RACHEL.

My lady could not answer when I spake.
Her kinsman's death hangs heavily ; and yet
She will sit down. Catherine is nobly born,
So takes her place : till asked for, I stand by.

NETHERSTEIN.

Art less than she is ?

RACHEL.

Now—in honor, I am :

In nature, more.

NETHERSTEIN.

But which of these is greatest ?

My sour yeast spoils our batch.

RACHEL.

Look, thou dost carve :

'Till called keep back, I say ; then show thyself.

The roast will stand at bottom—I shall ask it.

NETHERSTEIN.

Catherine goes with them home?

RACHEL.

She does to-morrow.

We two are bidden for Christmas. One thing grieves me.

NETHERSTEIN.

If only one, forget it, or defy it.

RACHEL.

I fain had supped the Baron ere his end,
And counted three great nobles at the board.

NETHERSTEIN.

This trout has slipped thine handling.

RACHEL.

Go and shift.

Look that the knives be steeled, then fill the flasks.

We serve at eight o'clock :—bid Tauss be ready—

The fawn is roasted whole and needs two bearers. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Chamber.

COUNT and OTHO.

COUNT.

Rowed the boat whither?

OTHO.

Down the stream, my lord.

Their search is for the drowned.

COUNT.

Who told thee so?

OTHO.

They said themselves it would be so.

COUNT.

Why quit them?

The sun is set—we risk our secret thus!

I strive to think the knave who shot so near me,

Aimed well by chance alone. But this is folly!

Why let them go?

OTHO.

The Countess held me here

Till these were past the haling to.

COUNT.

Straight down?

OTHO.

Not in midstream, but nearest this side yet.
Our eyes may scarcely reach them in the dusk.

COUNT.

Why should they choose the twilight for their search?
Thou canst not cross with them to-night?

OTHO.

I will.

The moon is past the full—at nine she rises—
They shall be taught that all must cross at dawn;
And why to-night we seek a landing-place.

COUNT.

Make them search upwards—then run thou below.
Swift, boy, not hasty—lest the work be botched.
Throw the sword wide enough, and sink the corpse.

OTHO.

My thrice-repeated lesson is but short:
I shall be perfect. We have most to fear
From such quick questioning as the Ferryman's.

COUNT.

I cannot be excused at supper-time:
The Countess wills it so to please her hosts.
All must sit down, she says.

OTHO.

Must I?

COUNT.

And these!

We play the prodigals—the swine feed with us.
Our troughs are served at eight.

OTHO.

The moon is later.

Even if the boat were ready, she is not:
Nor can we do without her.

COUNT.

Hark! the clock! [*Clock strikes.*

Come this way till they call. [*Exeunt Count and Otho.*

(*Enter Countess and Catherine.*)

COUNTRESS.

The boat is gone?

And none within it but the ferrymen?
If so—the better!—Almost eight o'clock?

CATHERINE.

The bell jars still—not hear it?

COUNTESS.

Why dost look
So thoughtfully upon me, gentle Kate?
Let us be merry, if we can, to-night—
Both never will again. What grieves thee, child?

CATHERINE.

'Twere better go to sleep!

COUNTESS.

Without our supper?

CATHERINE.

Leave it for healthier appetites. In truth
I never saw a face so pale alive!
Those eyes affright me.

COUNTESS.

Quarrel with mine eyes?

CATHERINE.

They look like gleeds of fire upon the snow!
My lady drops the answers to her questions;
Then stoops, like echo, for a word or two!
Not hear the clock?

COUNTESS.

Thine eyes are gentler, Kate.
I pray thee do not leave me, though I fright thee!
I would be loved by some one that is good.

CATHERINE.

Let us prepare for bed.

COUNTESS.

No!—supper first.
A cup of wine to bring my colour back.—
We will have such a supper here to-night,
As may be talked of after I am gone.
Canst love me, sister Kate, indeed?

CATHERINE.

Methought
I loved before, yet find it was but little—
Nor could I love the happy half so much.

COUNTESS.

Then shalt thou profit by my teaching, child.

Our homily so late as yesterday,
Was pride—the scorn of baseness—gentle blood :
To-night I give the sequel.

CATHERINE.

Hark !—they call.

COUNTESS.

Supper at last.

CATHERINE.

You tremble !

COUNTESS.

Stop awhile—

CATHERINE.

I pray sit down.

COUNTESS.

At table—so I will.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

*Moonlight. Bank of the Danube. The ferry-boat with the
figure of a man in it. Tycho landing from it.*

TYCHO.

Let one eye watch the boat, and one the moon.
Thou great Astrologer, a word with thee !
Sit starkly by the tiller there, and say
Whether I die a bachelor, or no ?
My fortune, sir ?—I can tell thine aright—
The worms shall eat thee—by to-morrow's noon,
The chapel-bell shall ring for thee. What sayst—
Which of the two is wisest, Colen or I ?—
He fears no man alive, whose breath is in him :
And I no dead one, be it fairly out.
But thou hast lost thine foully—Heaven forgive thee !
This iron-jointed Colen wept just now
To see me pluck the sword from 'twixt thy shoulders :—
He turned his face, and sobbed as doth a child !
He loaths to touch thee !

Enter Ferryman.

FERRYMAN.

Where hast left the corpse ?

TYCHO.

He sits abaft as steersman, there. Boat ! ferry !
Shove off !—be quick, boy !—would that Blast were crossing !
A cuff or two might warm this helmsman's ears,
And grieve him less than me.

FERRYMAN.

Hast got the cloak ?

TYCHO.

Cloak, hat, and both the swords, sir. Turns about !
I had my load down hill the other side :
If one of us must bear him up to supper—
Take thou thy spell, as strongest.

FERRYMAN.

Give the swords—

I cannot tarry now—we are too late—
The guests have supped : so cast a sail around him,
And come with me—make haste !

TYCHO.

Didst get inside ?

FERRYMAN.

No—not beyond the door, but near enough.
Give me his hat and cloak, with both the swords.
I will wear one of them—run after me—
But place a covering o'er the body first.

TYCHO.

He and the moon are eyeing one another,
Which of the two looks palest ! Let them be.

FERRYMAN.

Throw a sail over !

TYCHO.

Softly—patience—so !
(*Tycho covers the corpse.*) [Exeunt.

SCENE IV.

Hall. The table covered with fruits, and wine-flasks. COUNT, COUNTESS, OTHO, NETHERSTEIN, RACHEL, and CATHERINE seated. Servants of the house and of the COUNTESS attending.

RACHEL to servants.

The service ends, sirs, now that grace is said.
To help our meat we have but fruits as scanty :
These we may reach ourselves. Set other cups,
And flasks of sweeter wine, before ye go,
Then leave us, if my lady need you not.

COUNTESS.

Stay yet—let Gregory wait.

COUNT.

We shall be shamed
When Christmas brings our hosts to Schwannenstadt,
Remembering how we banquet here. It is
A feast for Charlemagne's peers !

NETHERSTEIN.

Ay, marry, is it ;
And all the emperors since, if each had been
No larger stomached than my lord and lady.

COUNT.

We hope for better health, and lighter crosses.
Bear lamps up stairs before the Countess, Ralph.
Sleep is our best and safest nourisher.
We must be roused at day-break—so farewell !
Look out for pleasant weather, boy. The moon [To Otho.
Is high by this time. Half-past nine o'clock !
She rose at half-past eight.

COUNTESS.

Stop first a little ;
And tell your kinsman what you say he is.

COUNT.

What does he say I am ?

COUNTESS.

Coward, traitor, murderer !

COUNT.

A murderer ! (*They all rise.*)

COUNTESS.

So he says—a double one.

COUNT.

Whom does he say I murdered ?

COUNTESS.

Both my cousins :

The first by fraud, long since, and many hands :

The other by thine own—behind his back—

So late as yesterday.

COUNT.

Did Otho say it ?

OTHO.

I did say so, and say it again, my lord.

COUNT.

Traitor and liar !

COUNTESS.

Sit down—let both sit still !

The time is not for brawls—nor shall we stun

So many ears by braggart cries and threats.

His words are plain enough—canst answer them ?

He calls thee murderer ; tells us who is slain ;

Time, place, and motive to the act.

COUNT.

Your cousins ?

COUNTESS.

The youngest first, through me—lied out of life—

Though slain in battle murdered by his friend !

The elder yesterday.

OTHO.

He told me so—

Cowardly murdered !

COUNT.

Some one lend a sword.

And let him say so then.

OTHO.

My lord's is pledged—

We must release it from this cousin's back !

Come with me, miller—I will find and bring it.

(Netherstein leaves his seat, and places himself between the Count and Otho.)

NETHERSTEIN.

This must be answered if the man is dead.

Behind his back !

COUNT.

I answer to my prince.

Arrest the traitor, Gregory Drinkinton !
Menno, lay hold !

COUNTESS.

These are my servants, sir.
Count Altheim has none here. They shall do so,
And seize the traitor, be he which he may.

COUNT.

How ! Gertrude !

COUNTESS.

Ay, the same—who will live yet
Where honour keeps the roof above her head ;
Or pull its pillars down to cover shame,
And die with all beneath it. Gertrude is
No heiress of the murdered, nor the wife
Of him who stabs men's backs. Why call for weapons ?
You can disprove his words, if false. He says
The Baron's body lies within a mile.

OTHO.

I do, and that Count Altheim's sword is in it :
The Baron's in its sheath. Send whom ye will :
I have been taught to guide them straight enough.
One is a traitor.

COUNTESS.

If but one is such—
No more than one—the Count is innocent.
This kinsman, picked from out some lazar-house,
Says that he loves his wife ! Traitor confessed,
A liar it may be.

*Enter Tycho, followed by the Ferryman, whose face is shaded
with a plumed cap, and muffled in a cloak. He carries a naked
sword in his hand, and places himself in the seat left by
Netherstein.*

TYCHO.

Melchior, stand aside.
A lord they left behind is come to-night :
The lord of Rabensberg !

COUNTESS.

My cousin ? alive !

OTHO.

The lord of Rabensberg !

FERRYMAN, *discovering himself.*

I am such now :
Your younger cousin, John of Rabensberg,

Succeeds his brother in the barony—
I was the Ferryman.

RACHEL.

Look ! here again !

Out, dog's-face ! get thee gone, thou morris fool !
Wouldst bring thy rogueries here, 'twixt life and death ?
With sword in hand, and plume upon thine head ?
Out with him, Melchior ! drag him out of doors !

FERRYMAN.

Be patient, mother-in-law ! There be some here—
The Count and Countess—will remember me.
She, when she speaks again, may tell thee so.
My cap and cloak were left me by my brother :
The sword beside me is inherited :
This other was the Count's.

TYCHO.

Done bravely, faith !

Rarely ! as breath is life ! The Count and Countess
Do look upon him for a lord indeed !
I have seen many a show come short of this.
He passes Punch a league and all to windward !
The moon herself is dazzled by him ! hark !

FERRYMAN.

I claim scarce half of what is mine, Count Altheim :
Only my name and honour. That is lost
Which outweighs both. But on my brother's behalf—
Whose blood it was which cried so loud last night—
I ask for justice too. Is this sword yours ?

[Gives it to the Count.]

OTHO.

He saves my journey—was it through the back ?

COUNT.

No matter, if it reach the heart, which passage—
This time it goes the other way. *[He stabs Otho, and exit.]*

NETHERSTEIN.

Hold ! hold !

FERRYMAN.

His kinsman, his confederate !

NETHERSTEIN.

Help me, Gregory !

The sword went through him !

FERRYMAN.

Melchior, bring him back—

Take the sword from him, Tycho !

NETHERSTEIN.

Here are weapons—

Run, Bernard—get behind—run warily!

FERRYMAN.

Murder for pastime!

NETHERSTEIN.

Help us to the coach.

RACHEL.

The chamber here within, sirs—hold his head!

NETHERSTEIN.

His very breath is bloody—lift him gently.

[*Exeunt.*

(*The Countess and Ferryman remain.*)

FERRYMAN.

Gertrude, I bring thee misery yet again!

I said those lips would curse me. What I do

Is ruin to thee, but it must be done.

I have no choice. Awake, and look upon me!

I was content to die from all remembrance—

Trusting my honor with forgetfulness—

Rather than live and grieve thee. Both deceived,

Let both forgive. I could not hide this murder!

COUNTESS rises, and comes forward.

And wherefore shouldst thou hide it? what afflicts thee?

Thou didst not come the first to bring down ruin—

'Twas I proclaimed the murder and the murderer.

Thank Heaven for that! the guilty fall together,

And by each other—I the chief of them:—

The cruel, the credulous!

(*Enter Catherine.*)

Come hither, child:

Why dost thou tremble at my kinsman thus?

CATHERINE.

I dare not stay within to see him die!

COUNTESS.

I neither fear nor wonder—scarce discern,

Amongst so many changes, life from death.

The one we looked for yesterday is lost—

The lost these seven years—he who fell by daylight—

The registered as slain—the praised and mourned for—

Is with us here!

FERRYMAN.

This should teach hope to both.

COUNTESS.

I hoped—no matter now what else I did!

Proud hopes are seldom prosperous— never long.
There is a sister left me—gentler, wiser—
Though falsely, let me think she is my gift—
That so, at last, I make a large amends—
Let me bestow her—her portion equals thine—
(*She gives him the hand of Catherine.*)

The half of Rabensberg.

FERRYMAN,

Make her a gift—

A happy gift—and not a legacy.

Be sister to us both, for wanting this

The rest were bare as winter. See, she kneels !

(*Catherine kneels.*)

Gertrude has power to make her cousin happy—

But never if she part from him again.

Behold, it is a promise ! lead her hence.

I have her hand and thine.—(*Exeunt Countess and Catherine.*)

(*Enter Netherstein and Rachel.*)

NETHERSTEIN.

The youth is dead !

This shall be taxed and answered. Why didst lend

The sword to such a butchery ? Lord of what ?

RACHEL.

Who else is killed, didst say ? My lady's brother ?

FERRYMAN.

My brother and her cousin.

RACHEL.

Thou her brother ?

Why shouldst thou kill her cousin, knave ?—Who art thou ?

FERRYMAN.

The Baron Rabensberg.

NETHERSTEIN.

Colen a Baron !

(*Enter Tycho and Servants.*)

TYCHO.

Thou shouldst have cast thy coxcomb off and helped.

The Count is gone.

FERRYMAN.

Which way ?

TYCHO.

To court, or that way—

Eastward, Vienna-ward—down stream at bottom,

And haply bottom upwards.

RACHEL.

Hush ! art mad ?

TYCHO.

Why not ? the rest are so—Count, Countess, Colen.
Why lift thy brows, in such a sort, above thee—
And magnify thyself against me thus ?

FERRYMAN.

He is not drowned ?

TYCHO.

Then try thy luck again—
See what canst do by diving ?

RACHEL.

Sirrah, hush !

TYCHO.

Speak ! speak !—hush ! hush !—I will row leisurely.
My lord was hard to catch, and ill to hold—
His sword swung round about, like Godfrey's windmill.
Tause fain had got behind—he judged so much,
Backed water, jumped aboard the ferry-boat—
And cut the tow-rope short to set her free—
At first, the current drifts him close in-shore
An oar's length from us as we run down stream.
And lo, that heavy Baron, by the helm,
Sits stark and still, the foresail over him.
By Haman's necklace, how this hallooed to him !

TAUSS.

And prayed to him !

TYCHO.

And swore at him !

TAUSS.

And shook him !

TYCHO.

And plucked the foresail from about his head !—
The moon shone brightly on them :—we might see
The dead man's eye-balls staring face to face !
Quick ears had heard the live one shrieking here !
He jumped—Tause says he tumbled overboard—

TAUSS.

We ran beyond to mark his rising-place—
The wherry got between us—Melchior saw him,
Went bravely in, at once—but could not find him.
His clothes were heavy.

TYCHO.

If he rose again,
It was beneath the boat.—Some think he did it—
He slew them both—the youth and Baron too !
And partly I believe he did.

NETHERSTEIN.

Caps off !

Colen himself is one !

TYCHO.

A what ?

NETHERSTEIN.

A lord.

TYCHO.

So am I too—lend me the cloak, cock robin !
Now that the play is over, strip thy bravery.

RACHEL.

Down on thy knees !

FERRYMAN.

His place is next my back
By land, as well as water, mother-in-law—
But let us two make fresher contracts now—
Henceforth, as I am dutiful, be kind.
He must live longer than I yet have done—
Bear more, and travel farther—who shall find
A sounder-hearted man than Netherstein—
We will be merry yet, and that together.

TYCHO.

Who says so ?—What art whispering, Bernard Brann ?
Do Baron-finders turn themselves to Barons
As tadpoles change to frogs—by staring at them ?
A Baron's son and brother !—not a soldier ?

FERRYMAN.

I was a soldier truly, as I said,
Where all our buffets did not fall in front.
One stopped and stunned me, ere aware of it.
Ten times life parted—then came back again.
My wits—which flew like bees whose hive is rifled,
Afraid to light and enter—stooped at last.
The surf of battle had run farther on—
It swamped, and left me stranded. Round about
Lay wrecks so broken that the shape of men
Was almost lost in them. With one beside me,
I changed mine arms and what might hurt by honouring—

x

He got the better burial. Fields like these
Have careful gleaners after death has reaped them,
Who stoop to pick the weightiest straws the first.
Of such I was aware in time—crept from them,
And when night came, found help.

NETHERSTEIN.

But grieved thy friends,
And lost thine heritage?

FERRYMAN.

I had none such.
As far as honour went, the war was done.
In this my life seemed luckier, ay, and longer
Than his may chance to do who counts fourscore—
I lived to hear it praised, so ended it :
And, free to please myself, began another—
Content with harmless mirth and peaceful bread.

THE END.

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